·HUMOR·

Tales from McClure's

A. W. B.

"'NOT A BAD HAUL.'"—BURGLARS THREE.

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By James Harvey Smith

THE JONESES' TELEPHONE
By Annie Howells Fréchette

A YARN WITHOUT A MORAL
By Morgan Robertson

THE KING OF BOYVILLE
By William Allen White

THE MERRY THANKSGIVING OF THE BURGLAR AND PLUMBER
By Octave Thanet

THE ROMANCE OF DULLTOWN
By James W. Temple

FAIRY GOLD
By Mary Stewart Cutting

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BURGLARS THREE

BY

JAMES HARVEY SMITH

BURGLARS THREE

AS a usual thing, when they cracked a crib, one of the three remained outside to warn with a whistle, or some other previously concerted signal, his companions inside. But on this occasion, when Jim Baxter opened the simple catch that fastened the woodshed door, and thence gained access to the interior of the house, Wilson Graham and Harry Montgomery followed softly after him. This breach

of burglarious custom was probably due to the fact that the Braithwait mansion was in the suburbs, some distance from the road, and several hundred yards from the nearest house.

Once inside, Mr. Graham lighted the gas, and it was then the work of a very few minutes to open the sideboard and subtract therefrom the family silver, and place it in a bag brought for that purpose. While this operation was taking place Montgomery made a tour of the upper rooms.

"I don't exactly like to trust Harry upstairs," remarked Baxter, in a surly tone, after he had securely tied the mouth of the bag. "He is too soft. Like as not he 'll go and git sentimental over a picture or somethin', or maybe git a-thinkin' of his mother, and leave half the ornyments."

Graham, who had just opened a pearl-inlaid secretaire, and was possessing himself of numerous valuable trinkets, laughed softly as he replied:

"I don't think so, Jim. Only yesterday I gave the boy a good talking to, and he prom-

ised to attend strictly to business in future. You must remember he is young, and unless we give him a chance, how is he to learn? Of course, if there was a young girl in the house—but there is n't," he added quickly, observing the wrathful frown on his companion's face. "I made certain that the only people who sleep in the house are Mr. Braithwait and the housekeeper, who is rather old and nearly deaf. The rest of the family are in Florida for their health. If Braithwait makes a disturbance, I reckon Harry can settle him without any sentimental nonsense."

"I 'd settle him," muttered Baxter, surlily.

"You 're a savage, Jim," said Graham, reproachfully. "How often have I told you that there is no virtue in violence? Have n't I convinced you that the easy way is the safe way?"

"Yah! Don't give me no more of that!" said Baxter, contemptuously. "I ain't no missionary."

At this juncture, when the argument threatened to develop into a quarrel, peace

"'I AIN'T NO MISSIONARY!'"

was restored by the reappearance of the young burglar, carrying a considerable quantity of jewelry, loose and in boxes, while he softly whistled "M'Appari."

"Not a bad haul," observed Graham, turning over the plunder as it lay on the table. "*Two* watches?"

"They 're them little tickers what the girls carry," said Baxter, scornfully. "We won't get two dollars apiece for 'em."

"Won't we, though!" said Graham, smiling. "They are gold, and there is an inscription on each. That means a fancy reward, or I don't know human feminine nature. Two brooches, a necklace—h'm—h'm—very good indeed."

"There was no money," remarked Harry, adjusting his necktie before the mirror, and giving his small blond mustache a curl.

"I expected as much," commented Graham, storing away the trinkets in his pockets. "Braithwait has a hundred with him, I dare say, but it is n't worth the risk. If we kill a man in the city it 's soon forgotten, but in the suburbs it creates a regular panic. The

neighbors hire detectives and follow a man all over creation, and you can't buy them off or compromise the matter—money is no object. That 's why I keep telling Jim—"

"Let up, will ye!" exclaimed Baxter, roughly. "I ain't killin' nobody, am I?"

"Certainly not; but I only say—"

"Say nothin'! Where 's the feed-box?"

Mr. Graham groaned, and looked at his young accomplice in comical alarm.

"I knew how it would be! Jim, these luncheons will be the ruin of us all, some night."

"Can't help it," retorted Baxter, doggedly. "It 's a good four-mile walk from the city, and as much back, and we had n't anythin' but a snack for supper. A man 's got to eat, and when I 'm hungry—"

"Well, well," said the other, with a gesture of impatience, "if it must be, it must. Harry, see to the wine, and we will find the substantials. Now, Jim, *do* be careful of the dishes, and *don't* grunt and puff while you 're eating. It 's vulgar."

Jim Baxter grunted and puffed at this, but

made no other reply as he busied himself spreading the contents of the refrigerator on the dining-room table, while Harry from the sideboard produced a decanter of whisky and three bottles of claret. There was a nice piece of cold ham, some tongue, cheese and pickles, bread and butter, anchovies and sardines, a bottle of olives, and the remains of an oyster-pie.

"Quite a lay-out," remarked Baxter, with a ravenous chuckle. "D' ye remember the house at Barleytown where there was n't nothin' but graham crackers and winegar in the box?"

"I should say so," exclaimed Graham, with a look of disgust.

"Some people are too mean to live," returned Baxter, savagely. "Come, shove over that decanter, and let 's pitch in. Fingers, gents, 'cause there ain't nothin' but silver knives and forks in this house, unless I take 'em out of the bag, which I ain't doin'. Here 's luck!"

"Excellent claret, Wilson," said the young burglar, holding his glass up to the light.

"Genuine Medoc," returned Graham, with the air of a connoisseur. "That 's the worst of this business; not one gentleman out of

"'EXCELLENT CLARET,' SAID HARRY."

ten is a judge of wine. Now, the whisky—"

"The whisky 's all right," interrupted Baxter, curtly. "All whisky 's good; some 's

better 'n others, but it 's all good. Blow claret!"

"No style about Jim," said Harry, with a smile that was half a sneer.

"No; you bet there ain't," said Baxter, stolidly. "You oughter call me 'Old Business,' 'cause that 's what I am. Pass them pickles."

It was a most interesting sight. At the head of the table sat Graham, a smooth-faced, well-fed man of forty, who might have passed for a prosperous banker or a man living on an annuity. To his right reclined rather than sat young Montgomery, a spruce and slender fellow with soft blue eyes, tremulous lips, and light hair, neatly brushed. Opposite Graham sat Baxter, a coarse, shaggy, grimy man, of uncertain age, with small, shifty eyes, a heavy beard, and a general air of brutal strength. Had it not been for the fact that each man wore his hat, and that the bag of stolen goods lay on one corner of the table, it might have been taken for a small stag-party, Graham personating the host to perfection.

The resemblance was lost, however, a moment later. The door leading to the back stairway, directly behind Jim Baxter, opened and revealed a spare man with long blond whiskers, wearing gold eye-glasses and a flowered dressing-gown.

Graham was the first to see the intruder, and his exclamation of astonishment caused Baxter to turn his head. In an instant that worthy was on his feet, with a pistol in his hand. Graham was quicker, however, and before his companion could raise the weapon he seized his arm and pushed him aside.

"No violence, Jim," he said sternly.

"I war n't goin' to shoot," growled Jim. "I was only goin' to give him a crack on the head."

"I won't have it," returned Graham, authoritatively. "Sit down."

Baxter put up his pistol and sat down. Graham then turned to the spare gentleman, who had not moved from the doorway during this episode.

"Mr. Braithwait, I presume?"

"'NO VIOLENCE, JIM!'"

"That is my name," was the composed reply. "Burglars, I presume?"

"The presumption is correct. Will you take a seat?"

Mr. Braithwait sat down opposite young Montgomery, to whom he bowed gravely. There was then a moment of silence, broken by Graham, who had resumed his place at the head of the table.

"I am sorry," said he, "you have made your appearance, as we can't very well apologize for our intrusion."

"No, I suppose not," said Mr. Braithwait, smiling. "Yet I am rather pleased that I did come, since I always enjoy an unusual experience."

"Glad you enjoy it," muttered Baxter; but no one listened to him.

"I was aroused by the reflection of the gaslight in the upper hall," explained Mr. Braithwait, "and I supposed that the housekeeper had left it burning—she has done so more than once. I came down to extinguish it. I heard voices in this room, and I entered."

"At the risk of your life," observed Graham, with a significant glance at Baxter, who had resumed eating.

"I did not think of that," said Mr. Braithwait, simply. "My life has been threatened so often—you know I am a railroad man—that I give little thought to the risk of an undertaking. Professionals, I suppose?"

He looked at Montgomery, who nodded nonchalantly and lighted a cigarette.

Mr. Braithwait coughed.

"I wish you would n't," he said deprecatingly. "Apart from the looks, I can't bear cigarette-smoke. There 's a box of very fine Conchas on the sideboard. Thank you"—to Graham—"if you will join me?—thank you again."

Graham laughed with genuine enjoyment, yet without vulgarity.

"I like you," he said frankly, "and I am sorry that, in the line of business—" He waved his cigar at the bag.

"Of course—yes, of course; I know that can't be helped," said Mr. Braithwait, smok-

ing away easily; "and that 's another reason why I 'm glad I came. I suppose you have in that bag some trinkets belonging to my wife and daughters that have a special value as mementos. I hear that you gentlemen are frequently forced to sell your plunder at a simply ruinous sacrifice, and it occurred to me that if we could come to some arrangement—you understand?"

"Perfectly," answered Graham. "It can be done, and I will open negotiations at an early date—provided, of course," he added severely, "that you play fair."

"That is understood. As a business man I accept the situation. My loss is your gain."

At this the youngest burglar broke silence for the first time.

"You are a philosopher," he said in a tone of admiration.

"What sensible man is not?" responded Mr. Braithwait, cheerfully. "I suppose it is capable of proof that the accumulated wisdom of the ancients amounts simply to the homely proverb, 'What can't be cured must

be endured.' My business is a sort of war, and I have my defeats as well as my victories. I must bear them both with equanimity."

"So is ours," said the youngest burglar. "As Horace says in his 'Epistles,' 'Cædimur, et totidem plagis consumimus hostem.'"

"Permit me," returned Mr. Braithwait, "to reply with Catullus: 'Nil mihi tam valde placeat, Rhamnusia virgo, quod temere invitis suscipiatur heris.'"

Montgomery flushed slightly, and Baxter growled an incoherent protest against the use of foreign languages.

"Of course I do not claim that I enjoy being robbed," continued Mr. Braithwait, "but I realize that it is not as bad as it might be. Last week you would have caught me with two thousand in cash in the house, and last month you would have horribly scared my wife and daughters."

"Not for worlds," murmured Mr. Montgomery.

"Well, you might have done so—women have such a detestation of robbers, except when they are in jail. The pleasure of your

visit—I hinted that I could extract pleasure from adversity—lies in the fact that it brings me in contact with a profession I have previously known only by hearsay. I suppose I may take it for granted you gentlemen are experts?"

"We 've been there before," said Baxter, coarsely.

"If an experience of fourteen years is any guaranty, then I am an expert," said Graham, with a certain air of pride in his tones. "Our friend there"—nodding at Baxter—"has, I believe, been in the profession since childhood; while Mr."—indicating Montgomery with his cigar—"you 'll excuse my not mentioning names?—is a beginner. A skilled workman, I admit, but this is only his second year."

"I don't wonder that he"—and Mr. Braithwait glanced slightly at Baxter—"remains in the business; but that you should follow the vocation for fourteen years surprises me greatly."

"Indeed?" queried Graham, with perceptible stiffness. "Why?"

"Because you appear to be a sensible man, and I should not think the business would pay. What is your annual income as a burglar?"

"'WHAT IS YOUR ANNUAL INCOME AS A BURGLAR?'"

"On an average, I should say three thousand a year."

"And you are an expert! I receive six thousand a year, and I am only assistant general freight agent, and have been but

twelve years in the business. Then I may infer that these two gentlemen make much less than three thousand?"

"I 've seen the week when I did n't make hod-carrier's wages," growled Baxter, who had now finished eating, and was preparing to smoke a black wooden pipe.

"You 're not so sensible as I thought," rejoined Mr. Braithwait, frankly. "I can easily imagine a man exposing himself to dreadful dangers and cruel privations when there is a great prize in view. An explorer like Stanley, a pioneer like Pike or Fremont, a conqueror like Cortez, or a revolutionist like Washington, could well brave hardship and peril, when success meant wealth as well as the plaudits of their fellow-men. The early settlers of this and every other country, the gold-hunters of '49, the pirates who ravaged the seas, all were actuated by the hope of a fortune at one swoop; but to risk prison, to say nothing of life itself, for a day-laborer's wages!—"

"But," spoke up Montgomery, quickly, "there is fame, if not fortune."

"Pardon me. In what way?"

"In the usual way. Who has not heard of Hickey, the man who cracked twenty banks before they tripped him up? Peters, the New England cracksman? Bronthers, the Chicago expert?"

"I hope," said Mr. Braithwait, gently, "I won't offend you when I say I never heard of those gentlemen."

"Is it possible!"

"Honestly, I never did."

"You have surely heard of Red Leary?"

"I can't recall his name."

"George Post? Louis Ludlum? Pete McCartney? Miles Ogle?"

"Don't know them."

"Perhaps"—sarcastically—"you don't read the papers?"

"Yes, I do; and I have a good memory. I can say without boasting that I have on my tongue's end all the professional, literary, and artistic names in America, and many in Europe. In my library I have many biographies, but none of which a burglar is the theme; nor do I recall the name of a cele-

brated criminal, unless"—pleasantly—"he has been hanged."

"Yet there *are* famous names in our profession," persisted the young burglar, somewhat sullenly.

"Oh, yes," admitted Mr. Braithwait, taking a small drink of claret. "Literature has preserved Claude Duval, Jack Sheppard, Dick Turpin,—all hung,—Fra Diavolo, who was shot, and even our own James and Younger boys; and I have heard vaguely of one Billy the Kid somewhere out West. In a general sense, literature and the drama are saturated with bandits, brigands, and outlaws, sometimes comical, sometimes heroic; but you will excuse me if I maintain that you stand on a different footing. Those fellows always had a poetical backing; somebody or something had driven them to their illegal calling; but you can scarcely make a similar claim."

"I don't know about that," protested Baxter, doggedly. "Who 'd give *me* a job?"

"Did you ever try?"

"No; nor I ain't goin' to!"

"As I supposed. Honest work is plentiful; therefore you are absolutely without excuse. No one has usurped your name and fortune, stolen your ancestral home or intended bride; neither have you been outlawed for your political or religious beliefs, or unjustly accused of crime."

The big burglar looked extremely blank at this pointed address, and, grumbling, took a drink of whisky. Mr. Graham promptly came to his companion's relief:

"You have made out a *prima facie* case, as the lawyers say, but the fact remains that there *is* a fascination in the life we lead, and some romance. There is mystery about it, for one thing, and danger, for another. Then we certainly have the sympathy of a certain class of society when we are prisoners."

"Is not the sympathy to which you allude confined to murderers, especially those who kill their wives?"

"As a rule, yes," admitted Graham; "but the people who have sympathy for murderers generally have such a superabundance that they can spare some for us. I have known

burglars to receive six bouquets in a single day, and from real ladies, too."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Braithwait, with a smile, "that the sympathy extended with such small discretion has little market value. But let us pass that by, and glance at the disagreeable side of your profession. For instance, this night you have walked from the city, the nearest point of which is three miles."

"We come four," growled Baxter.

"Well, four; and four back is eight. It could not have been a pleasant walk, as the night is cloudy and the roads are heavy from recent rains."

"There war n't no choice," said Baxter, savagely. "We *had* to walk."

"There it is," said Mr. Braithwait, triumphantly; "you *had* to walk. Now I don't have to walk; I ride in the train or my carriage at any hour of the day or night. No honest man has to walk if he has money—and of course you have."

"The point," admitted Mr. Graham, reluctantly, "is well taken."

"I feel certain of it. Nor is this the only instance in which your pleasure is marred by fear. The very fame for which you strive is a constant bar to your enjoyment. If you take lodging at a hotel you are ejected; you may be refused admittance to any respectable theater; in any place of entertainment, except the very lowest, you cannot make a new acquaintance, for fear he may be a detective plotting your capture; you are compelled to eat, drink, and sleep among vile associates and vulgar surroundings; and all for a pitiful three thousand a year! By heaven! it is worth thirty!"

"You use strong language, sir," exclaimed the youngest burglar, rising and pacing the floor in an agitated way.

"I do," admitted the master of the house, "because my business sense is outraged by your stupidity."

"Stupidity!" echoed Graham, sharply.

"That is the word," returned Mr. Braithwait, sternly. "Your profession requires acuteness, courage, skill, caution, and endurance. Gentlemen, these are admirable

traits, and with them you might be anything but burglars. The banking institutions, railways, private and civic corporations, are eager for such men; they pay them large wages and grant them great privileges. The governments, State and national, want such men, and are looking for them, while they are skulking through city alleys, or walking miry roads at midnight. Gentlemen, with all your qualifications, you lack the one essential to success—common sense."

"Permit me," said Graham, leaning over the table and speaking with much force, "to call your attention to the fact that we are bright enough to keep society eternally on the defensive."

"Granted," said Mr. Braithwait.

"Small in numbers though we are, we necessitate the employment of a police force in every village, town, and city in the Union, to say nothing of special constables and private watchmen. We force every bank and corporation to sink thousands in costly safes, locks, and other safeguards, and no householder is ever free from apprehension on our

account. We are one against many, so to speak, but we make the many tremble! Could we exercise this power without brains?"

"Aye! could we?" supplemented Montgomery, with flashing eyes.

"Granted again," said Mr. Braithwait, cheerfully; "but quite foreign to the point at issue. Society is terrorized through its inertness, and when society enters on an active warfare you gentlemen cannot make a show of resistance. And even under our present policy of passive resistance there is but one thing that will save a criminal from the eventual clutch of the law, and that is—death."

The youngest burglar turned white, and Baxter cursed softly.

"You cannot, with all your brightness, commit a crime without leaving a trace," went on Mr. Braithwait, impassively, "and every modern appliance is a stumbling-block in your path. The modern bank safe, equipped with time-locks, is impregnable; the electric light has made our streets as

safe by night as day; and the telegraph has lengthened the arm of justice until it encircles the globe."

"And yet," retorted Graham, with a slight sneer, "*you* have been robbed."

"And yet I have been robbed," repeated Mr. Braithwait, calmly. "Without interfering sadly with my comfort and ease, I cannot make my house a bank or surround myself with an army of watchmen; and I don't like dogs. So I have been robbed. Yet"—Mr. Braithwait looked Mr. Graham quietly in the eye—"yet I am not entirely defenseless."

"Hello!" said Baxter, breathing hard, "have you been up to somethin'?"

"You shall judge whether I have rightly accused you of lack of common sense. Before attacking this house, did you make yourself acquainted with the surroundings?"

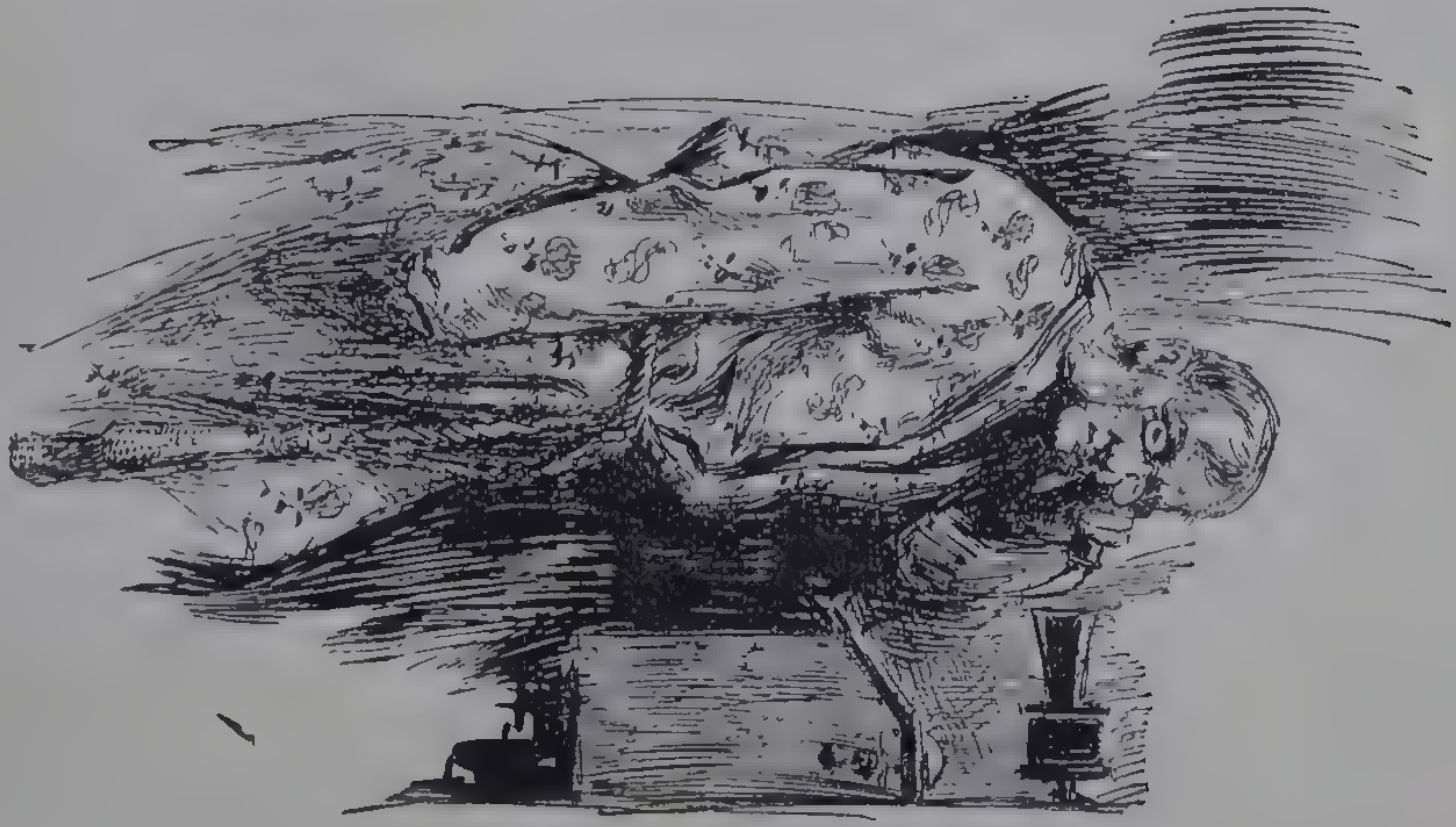
"I did," answered Graham, confidently.

"Do you know that I am a railroad man?"

"Certainly."

"Did you notice a wire running through the woods at the rear of my house?"

"No!" cried Graham, violently.



"A strange oversight on your part. Very stupid. It is a telephone-wire, and leads from my chamber above to my office in the city. Now for the application of my remarks. From the moment of your entrance I was aware of your movements, and instantly explained the situation to the night operator. He, of course, notified the police—"

"And while you kept us engaged in conversation—" cried Graham, advancing threateningly.

"The police were coming on a special train to my assistance," said Mr. Braithwait, taking a second cigar.

"Damn you!" exclaimed Baxter, threateningly.

"Stop!" cried Graham, interposing. "We have no time for that. Let us run!"

"Don't!" said the host, warningly. "The house is surrounded, and you will certainly be shot. Accept the situation, as I did. You gentlemen have been my guests this evening, and I have been highly entertained. May I hope that the pleasure has been mutual?"

Before any one could answer, the door leading to the woodshed was thrown open, and four policemen appeared on the threshold. Montgomery sank helplessly into a chair, Baxter made a dash for the door, while Graham remained impassive; but all were alike handcuffed expeditiously.

"Sir," said Graham, taking a cigar from the box, "our misfortune is directly due to the uncontrollable appetite of our companion, but none the less I congratulate you upon your ingenuity."

"Thanks," said Mr. Braithwait. "Did I not tell you that you were stupid?"

Mr. Graham bowed.

"You have taught us a lesson," he said gravely. "I think it is time to abandon the business."

"Well, I 'll be—" Baxter gasped, and could say no more.

"We are disgraced!" exclaimed the youngest burglar, bitterly.

Mr. Braithwait waved his hand.

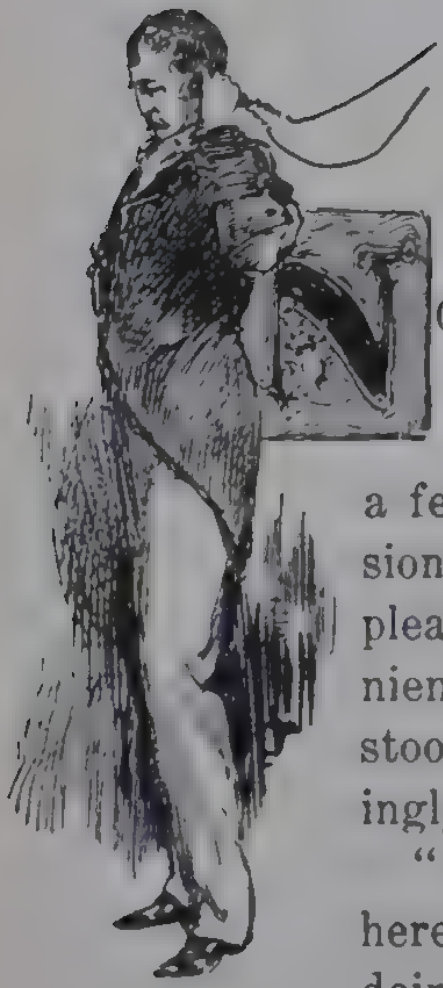
"I am sleepy," he said, with a yawn. "Gentlemen, good night; I will see you again —in court."

THE JONESES' TELEPHONE

BY

ANNIE HOWELLS FRÉCHETTE

THE JONESES' TELEPHONE



"NOW, we won't be selfish with our telephone, will we, dear? We will let a few friends use it occasionally—it will be such a pleasure and a convenience." And Mrs. Jones stood off and looked admiringly at the new telephone.

"By all means. It is here, and it may as well be doing some one a service as to stand idle; and I like to feel that a friend isn't afraid to ask a favor of me now and then. Yes, I suppose that telephone will save us

many a car-fare during the year. You can use it to do your marketing, instead of tiring yourself out and wasting half a day three or four times a week; and days when I forget things, think how easy it will be to telephone and remind me. Why, it will entirely do away with the need for strings to tie around my fingers."

"Of course it will. I 'm sure that what we 'll save on strings and car-fare will pay the rent of the instrument," joyously responded Mrs. Jones, who had no great head for figures.

Thus hope and kindly intentions presided at the inauguration of the Joneses' telephone.

Three months passed, and the great invention had carried much information—useful and otherwise—not only to its owners, but to the entire neighborhood as well. There were even days when the Joneses questioned whether they were not running a public telephone, so often did the bell ring. It is true it had not quite paid for itself in the anticipated saving of car-fares and finger-strings; still it had certainly been a

great comfort, and "Well, we 'll just face the music and call it a luxury," said Jones, as he put away the receipt for his first quarter's rent—"especially for our friends," he added with just a touch of bitterness.

Scarce twenty-four hours after this philosophical stand was taken, Mrs. Jones, who was rather a light sleeper, was aroused by a violent and prolonged ringing. It was six o'clock and Sunday morning—a day and hour usually dedicated to undisturbed slumber. After a brief debate in her own mind as to whether the house was on fire or the milkman was ringing, she realized that it was the telephone-bell. She hastily donned slippers and gown, and ran down-stairs. In reply to her interrogative "Yes?" (Mrs. Jones could never bring herself to say "Hello!") came the following, in measured and clerical tones:

"It is Mr. Brown—Reverend Mr. Brown—speaking."

"Oh! yes?"—instinctively covering her half-clad feet in the folds of her gown.

"I believe you live near the Reverend Mr. Smith, and are a member of his church."

"Yes."

"Will you be good enough to send to him, and ask if he can spare his curate to take Mr. Brown's early service for him, as he is called away? I would be glad if you would send immediately, as I must have his answer within fifteen minutes. Thank you. Please call up 1001," and snap went the telephone.

Mrs. Jones looked at her raiment, and reflected that her one servant was at mass and would not be back for an hour. She went slowly up-stairs.

"Tom, Tom, dear, wake up."

"What is it?"

"The Reverend Brown has telephoned to know whether the Reverend Smith can send his curate to take his early service."

"Well, what in the world have I got to do with the peddling out of early services?" snapped Jones, as he turned and shook up his pillows.

"He has to have an answer to his message within fifteen minutes."

"Well, let Susan take it"—settling back comfortably.

"But Susan has gone to mass."

"And I suppose that means that I am to

be turned out of my bed at daybreak and canter half a mile!" cried Jones, in a high and excited voice, as he bounced from his

bed and began to grope sleepily for his clothes. His toilet was made amid grumblings of "Confound their early services! Why can't they stay in bed like Christians, instead of prowling about, and sending men out in the chilly morning air?" etc.

Jones's temper was soured for the day, and that night, as he was winding his watch, he said severely: "Jane, I 'm going to draw the line at delivering messages. Tom, Dick, and Harry can come here and bellow into the telephone until they are hoarse, but I 'll be switched if I 'll be messenger boy any longer."

But messages continued to come and go, increasing rather than decreasing in frequency. People in the neighborhood fell into the habit of saying to friends in distant parts of the city, when leaving a question open: "Just telephone me when you make up your mind. I have n't a telephone myself, but the Joneses have, and they are very obliging about letting me use it."

So the fact that a telephone was owned by an obliging family circulated almost as rapidly as if it had been a lie.

There were times when Mrs. Jones had n't the face to ask Susan to stop her work and carry these messages, so she carried them herself—trying to keep up her self-respect by combining an errand of her own in the same direction. There were a few messages, however, which remained forever indignantly shut within the telephone; as, for instance, that of the little girl, which came in a shrill, piping voice:

"Mrs. Jones, will you send your servant over to Mrs. Graham's to ask Milly where she got that perfectly delicious delight she gave me the other day? And tell her to be quick about it, please, for I 'm waiting."

And another, which came in chuffy, distorted, conversational English—regular "chappie" English, very hard to understand, but which she finally straightened out into: "I say there—aw—oh—is that you, Mrs. Jones? Sorry to trouble you, but would you be so awfully good as to send word to Mrs. Bruce—aw—that I 'm awfully cut up about it, but I won't be able to dine there to-night? Aw—I would n't trouble

you, but it 's so awfully hot I can't go round to explain to her—you know. Thanks, awfully." The telephone was closed, and the awfully cut-up young man, whose sole claim on Mrs. Jones was that they had once met at a party, was left to be healed by time.

He had for company in his fate the enthusiastic tennis-player who, in the midst of "a little summer shower," summoned Mrs. Jones.

"I want to speak to Flannigan, the gardener."

"This is not Flannigan's telephone."

"And who is speaking?"

"Mrs. Jones."

"Oh, well, Mrs. Jones, I can give my message to you just as well. I want you to tell Flannigan to come and roll the tennis-ground at once. He will understand. Tell him right away, please."

"Flannigan does not live here."

"Well, you can send him word, I suppose,"—in a surprised and offended voice, —"to oblige a *lady*. It is *Miss Mortimer* who is speaking." And there was an impressive silence. Mrs. Jones remembered

Miss Mortimer as a high-stepping young woman whom she had met at a friend's house, and who had given her the impression of taking an inventory of her. So Mrs. Jones took pleasure in replying, "Miss Mortimer probably does not know that she is addressing a private telephone. Good day."

But it was Jones, the luckless Jones, who seemed set aside for the cruel buffeting of the telephoning public. One night, which he will ever point to as the wildest and wettest night he has known, he had settled himself into his most comfortable chair, with a pile of new magazines beside him, when he was disturbed by a summons from the telephone. He responded with readiness, for he was rather expecting a call from his partner, and to his cheerful "Hello, old fellow! I 'm here," came, in a sputtering and wind-tossed voice, "Will you please tell Mrs. Goodson that, as it is so stormy, her daughter will not go home to-night?"

Jones turned and confronted his wife, and for a time words refused to come.

"Well, this is a little too much! Now

think of an unknown voice barking at me to go out into a storm like this and tell the Goodsons that their daughter will not be at home to-night!"

The Goodsons lived just six squares away.

"And what will you do, dear? Why did n't you say plainly that you would not and could not go out into a storm like this —that they must send a messenger?"

"They shut me off without giving me time to answer."

"Well, call them up. Call them up at once."

"Jane, please have some sense. How do I know where Miss Goodson has gadded off to? How do I know what number to call up?"

"Well, I just would n't go."

"Oh, I 'll have to. They are friends, and if they are expecting that girl of theirs home to-night, and she does n't come, Mrs. Goodson will go out of her mind."

So Jones drove himself forth, clad in righteous indignation and a waterproof coat. The cold rain lashed him, and the wind belabored his umbrella, and he was

more than once obliged to pause under friendly porches to get his breath. At last the home of the Goodsons was reached, and, spent and weary, he staggered up the steps. Goodson himself opened the door.

"Hello, Jones; you 're no fair-weather friend, indeed. Come in, come in."

"No, I 'm too wet," he answered pointedly (and he felt like adding "and too mad"). "I only came to tell you that Miss Goodson won't be home to-night."

"My daughter? She is at home. Don't you hear her playing on the piano now? Come into the vestibule, anyway."

Jones walked in, with the rain streaming from his coat.

"Katey!" called Mr. Goodson to his wife. "Here is Jones come to say that Julia won't be home to-night."

"What?" demanded Mrs. Goodson, appearing in the hall, and regarding Jones as if he were a mild sort of lunatic. "*Julia is* at home."

"Well, I don't understand it," said Jones, plaintively. "I was rung up half an hour

ago, and asked to come and tell you that your daughter would n't be at home on account of the storm."

"And do you mean to say that you stand ready to turn out at all hours and deliver messages free of cost?" cried Goodson.

"It looks that way."

"Well, you are an ass."

"Don't compliment me too freely, Goodson. I can't take in much more; I 'm soaked as it is."

Mrs. Goodson stood thinking. "Who could have been meant? Oh, I 've just thought! It must be that Mrs. Goodson who sews for Mrs. Jones and me. And she has a daughter, —a type-writer down-town,—and she has friends living in the suburbs. She has doubtless gone there to dinner, and concluded to stay all night. But she lives just around the corner from you."

Goodson laughed loudly and brutally. "A bonny sort of a night for a respectable family man like you, Jones, to be skylarking around carrying messages for type-writing maidens!"

"Oh, come now; that 's a little too much!"

"Well, old man, I 'll show my gratitude for your friendly intentions toward me by going round to the telephone people the first thing in the morning, and complaining of you. You 've no right to be running opposition to the public telephones in this way."

"*If* you only would!" And Jones wrung his friend's hand, while tears of thankfulness welled up to his eyes.

Once in the street, he longed for a contemptuous enemy to kick him briskly to the door of the widow Goodson. The latter was evidently about to retire, as it was a long time before she responded to his ring. When finally she did come, she heard him calmly through, and then answered languidly:

"Yes; I did n't much expect Bella home to-night, for she said if it come on to rain she thought she 'd stay with her cousins. Good night. Quite drizzly, is n't it?"—peering out into the darkness.

Full of bitterness, Jones turned homeward. It seemed to him that his cup was full, and so it was, for it refused to hold more. As

he entered his home, chilled without but hot within, he was greeted by an unfamiliar voice coming from the regions of the telephone.

"Give me Blair's," it said. "Is that Blair's? Is that—Blair's—B-l-a-i-r-'s,—do you understand? Oh, yes; it is you, is it, Mrs. Blair? Well, say I want to speak to Miss McCrea. Oh—pshaw! you must know her—she 's the young lady that works for you. Oh, she 's out, is she? Well, when she comes in, tell her Miss Doolan told you to say that Mr. Brennan has broke his leg,—she 'll know; he drives Judson's horses,—and me and Mrs. Judson want to know whether he 's to go to the hospital or to his friends. You can send your answer to No. 999. They 'll let me know. Give Miss McCrea my love, and tell her not to worry about Mr. Brennan. Good-by."

Jones confronted a stately creature as she stepped into the hall.

"Look here, young woman; who are you?"

"I 'm Miss Doolan, and I 'm stopping at Judson's—as housemaid," she answered, so

taken aback that for the moment her self-possession failed her.

"And to whom have you been telephoning?"

"To Blair's—Judge Blair's, over on the avenue. A friend of mine stops there."

"And are you in the habit of calling up ladies in that fashion?"

"It 's a very good fashion, for all *I* can see," she retorted impudently.

"And what business have you to order an answer sent here for me to carry on a night like this?"

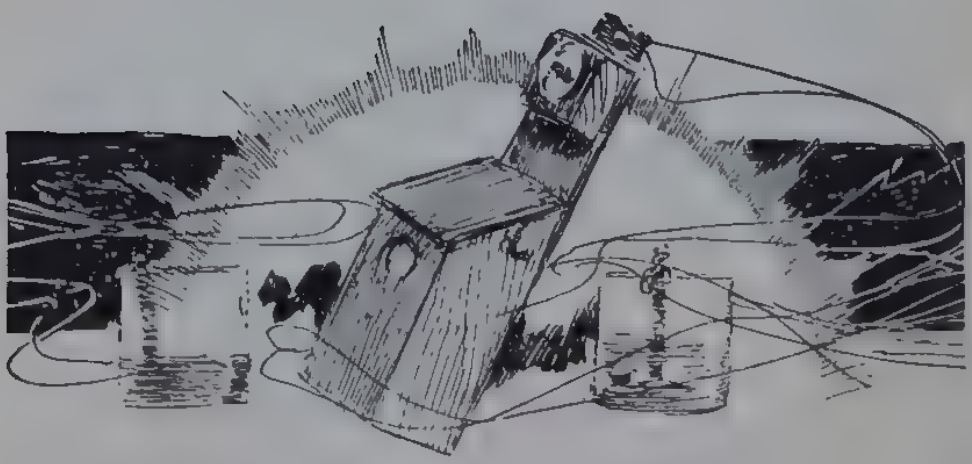
"Mrs. Judson and me took you for a *gentleman*, sor, and we thought you would n't mind obliging ladies."

"Nor do I; but I don't know either Mrs. Judson or you, and I don't propose running errands for you."

"Oh, then don't bother yourself, sor—we can hire a boy," she flung back with a scornful laugh as she bounced out.

"Now, Jane, I want you distinctly to understand that the last message has been carried from this house. I have probably to-night sown the seeds of pleurisy and pneumonia broadcast in my system; I have walked twelve squares to deliver a message to the wrong person; we have had a baggage here using our telephone as if it were her own; and we have been at the beck and call of the unpaying public for the last six months. Now, if the telephone people are

not here by noon to-morrow, to threaten legal proceedings against me (Goodson has promised to complain of me) for undermining their business, I shall have that wretched instrument dragged away, body and soul, and we will try some other form of economy in the future."



A YARN WITHOUT A MORAL

BY

MORGAN ROBERTSON

A YARN WITHOUT A MORAL

IT was in the early days of lake traffic, when vessels were small, discipline lax, and when each forecastle might contain one or more part-owners. Dunkirk Sam, Bill Tubbs, and Starboard Jack, composing the crew of the little schooner *Alma*, held no such dual relations with their captain; they drew wages, not profits. But as their captain was old Long Tom Tucker, of their own town, whom they loved and "sassed" and advised and obeyed as they pleased, their treatment of him was in no way calculated to impress strangers with any other belief than that they owned the whole vessel—and Captain Tom, too.

At Kingston, after discharging cargo, they

had put on their shore clothes and selfishly gone to the theater, leaving Captain Tom to keep ship or go ashore with himself or the cook, as he liked. The mate, newly shipped, lived in Kingston, and early in the evening had fled to the bosom of his family. The captain sulked for a while under the slight put upon him by his "boys," went ashore alone, met his agent, then hunted up his mate and sent him aboard, for the agent had secured him a load from Port Hope to Oswego. Then he hied himself to the one theater of the town, bought a ticket, went in, and vainly coaxed the three unregenerates to heed the call of duty. Useless endeavor. They were kind to him, asked him to sit with them, but would not budge until the performance ended. Captain Tom coaxed, ordered, fumed, and finally swore, then was collared by a scandalized fat policeman and cast forth into outer darkness, followed by the heartless threat of the three to tell his wife and the minister when they got home—for Captain Tucker was a sturdy pillar of the church.

Filled to the brim with "aggravation," he

returned to the wharf where his vessel lay, and helped the mate loose the canvas, vowing to pay off the three "sogers" at the first American port.

The three left the theater at eleven o'clock, and leisurely made their way to the vessel. Had they seen a restaurant they would have satisfied their slight hunger before putting themselves under Captain Tom's domination. Not that they anticipated increased peril from the weakness attending empty stomachs, but they knew that the cook, as indifferent to nautical etiquette as themselves, had turned in for the night. Hence there would be no night lunch prepared, and it was a long time until breakfast.

Discussing the matter made them hungrier. Starboard Jack suggested the advisability of turning back and hunting for an eating-house. "For," he said, "the skipper won't turn the cook out for us to-night, but he 'll get his own nibble from the galley." They agreed to this, and Captain Tom's prospective selfishness condoned their own mutinous behavior, giving the balance of injury to

them. They became outrageously hungry, and halted when a rooster, aroused by their voices, rose to full stature, cluttered at them, and settled down again. Fatal mistake.

Starboard Jack testified later that visions of a chicken pot-pie, partaken of at home, entered his brain, and the savory odor seemed to be in his nostrils. Bill Tubbs admits that his wayward thoughts serenely reviewed an oft-regretted early dissipation, in which he had disgracefully attended a cock-fight. Dunkirk Sam never committed himself, but it is on record that Dunkirk Sam was the first to sneak.

"Mighty fine rooster—Shanghai, too," he said.

"Nice and fat," remarked Bill Tubbs, turning square the other way, thus putting temptation behind him.

Why discuss the devious course of criminal thoughts through the doubts and fears of non-criminal brains? Ten tarry digits closed around the neck of the drowsy bird, stifling the indignant outcry. Five were re-

moved later to the struggling claws, which threatened to ruin Starboard Jack's new "go-ashore" coat. Three guilty marauders fled through the darkness.

It was blind, illogical crime, for crime's sake alone. Their hunger may have suggested the abduction; the abduction could in no way satisfy their hunger. But this did not occur to them. Guilty fear possessed their souls, excluding other thoughts, even of their empty stomachs.

With the rooster snugly imprisoned under Starboard Jack's arm, they tumbled over the *Alma's* rail and down the forecastle stairs, unheeding the tirade of reproach launched at them by Captain Tom. Here a hurried confab resulted in the raising of the trap-door and the unceremonious bundling of the nearly choked fowl into the inky darkness of the forepeak. One protesting squeak arose from the depths. Then they changed their clothes, went up and made sail, taking meekly the scolding they had deserved. Captain Tom's wrath finally gave way to astonishment at their submissiveness, and

he desisted, for they had given him not one word of "back talk." How could they?

Captain Tom Tucker was a Lake Erie navigator. He had brought his little schooner down to glean some of the lucrative barley-trade of the lower lake. Knowing nothing of Lake Ontario, he had secured a mate who did, and this was enough—for summer sailing at least. He had no use for charts—would not have one aboard—or any other salt-water methods. He believed in carrying courses and distances in his head, where he could get at them when needed.

An hour after the mate had given the course up the north shore and turned in, the fog shut down, moist and thick, blotting out the patch of blacker darkness that loomed up as land to the northward, and making the voice of Dunkirk Sam, heaving the lead at the request of the anxious captain, sound hoarse and resonant as he called out, "No bottom."

Captain Tucker wished, not for a chart, but that he knew that shore better. Not caring to call the mate, he took his stand at

the weather-bow, tooting the fog-horn, and straining sight and hearing into the wet blanket ahead. The wind was off the land at an angle which just allowed Bill Tubbs at the wheel to lay his course.

In his bunk in the forecastle was Starboard Jack, making the best he could of his watch below, and beneath him, be it remembered, was the confiscated rooster. Either his conscience or his empty stomach or the fog-horn above kept Starboard Jack awake, and he rolled out to enjoy the usual sailor's relief from insomnia—he lighted his pipe.

It was not daylight, nor time for it, and the occupant of the forepeak had no legitimate right or reason to think so. He was, no doubt, rather upset by the night's adventure, and his powers of discernment were unequal to the task of distinguishing between daylight and the flicker of a lighted match showing through the chinks in the forecastle floor. Or it may be that he understood and merely expressed approval of the light shed on his darkness. He gave vent to a hearty, long-drawn crow, which, reaching the ears of

Captain Tom on the weather-bow, muffled and indistinct, seemed to him to come from the lee side, where there should be nothing but open water.

"Great snakes, where are we?" he shouted. "Hear that, Dunkirk? Did you hear it? Light up the jib-sheets. Hard-a-lee. There 's land over there."

Around went the little vessel. Starboard Jack heard, with dismay, the sounds beneath and above, and started up to forestall any further mischief by an honest confession; but the sight of Dunkirk Sam's round face, shaking with silent, unholy glee, as he peered down the hatch during the transit from jib-sheet to jib-sheet, sent him back. Dunkirk Sam returned to the lead, while Captain Tom tooted the horn from the weather-bow, now, of course, the other side. When a lonely rooster begins to crow it is hard to guess when he will stop. The schooner had been skimming along straight for the shore for five minutes, and Dunkirk Sam had just called out, "Mark twenty, hard bottom," when Captain Tom distinctly heard another

rooster—not the first. They were leaving that astern. This one was on the lee-bow as before, but in another direction.

"Oh, my good Lord," he groaned, "where in Sam Hill are we? Barn-yards all 'round: we 're goin' up some river. Hard up, Bill," he yelled; "hard up! Slack off the main sheet an' get her 'fore the wind."

Waving his long arms and shouting, he ran aft to look at the compass, and call the mate, if necessary. Dunkirk Sam jerked the lead inboard and sped to the forecastle hatch.

"Starboard," he called in a hoarse whisper, "you awake?"

"What?"

"Ring his neck; the old man 's goin' daft. He near beached her."

Dunkirk Sam's sense of humor had left him when his lead reached bottom.

Captain Tom steadied his vessel due southeast, and had partially recovered his wits, when, from straight ahead, he heard another rooster. The misguided fowl in the forepeak had proclaimed his third defiance, just as Starboard Jack raised the trap-door to de-

scend upon him. Loud and clear came the clarion note to the ears of the perplexed skipper, to whom it seemed not three lengths ahead.

"Hard down," he snarled to the grinning Bill; "hard down, man; down with that wheel; we 're goin' ashore. What you laughing at? Down with it." He seized the spokes, and ground the wheel over.

"Bring her up and shake her," he shouted back as he raced forward with great leaps. "Get that anchor over. Dunkirk, call Starboard."

Starboard Jack was forced to come up, and the rooster enjoyed a reprieve. Hurriedly, under the supervision of the frantic skipper, they pried the big anchor off the bow, lowered and let it go as the schooner shot up into the wind, shaking her sails. Bill Tubbs now lay himself on the deck near the wheel and rolled in convulsive laughter, but the two worthies forward ruefully watched the skipper insanely pay out chain until, with thirty fathoms out, the anchor caught. They anticipated the heaving in.

Ordering the foresail and jibs lowered, in a tone which admitted of no protest, Captain Tom stalked around the deck. The rooster, possibly frightened by the deafening din of the chain going out, remained silent, and the guilty ones hoped for a chance to silence his voice forever, as Captain Tom was in no humor to take a joke. But Captain Tom stayed forward, blowing the horn at intervals and looking anxious.

Daylight came, and with it a change of wind which scattered the dense fog into curious detached masses of smoky shapes, showing the north shore fully two miles away, and not a farm, barn-yard, or rooster within range of the astounded captain's vision. His face was a study.

With open mouth, puckered forehead, and bulging eyes, his gaze wandered from the shore to the water each side, to his innocent-looking crew, to his own long figure, which he scanned from his feet up as though doubting his own existence, and back to the shore.

The mate and the cook were called, and

all hands manned the windlass, the captain holding slack and earnestly explaining to the mate the ghostly interference of the night. "What you grinnin' at, you three?" he suddenly demanded.

As he spoke, the rooster, encouraged by the faint diffusion of the morning light in his prison, crowed again. It was a startling, enthusiastic crow, long and weird. In it he expressed his appreciation of the kindly light, his disgust at his treatment, and defiance to his enemies, his hunger, his thirst, his memory of the happy barn-yard home, and his desire to get back. It was his soul's tribute to liberty and happiness, but it was his death-knell.

It was followed by an uproarious burst of laughter, and Captain Tom, with a reproachful glance at his men, descended and wrung his neck. Then he reappeared, and with legs apart and arms waving, declaimed. Nothing would excuse an exact repetition of his language. Chicken-thieves, scoundrels, ingrates, miserable low-down "whittlin's of nothin'," were some of the names he called

them, well sprinkled with shocking piratical profanity. "Might ha' known somethin' was up," he concluded; "you 've been so all-fired civil."

After breakfast, while steering, Dunkirk Sam ventured to expostulate. "We lifted him, cappen, 'cause we don't get much fresh meat in your vessel. Now I 'll tell you what we 'll do. If you 'll let the cook fix him up for a pot-pie dinner, and you 'll promise yourself not to pay us off, as you said, why, we 'll all promise, every one of us, not to tell the other cappens 'bout it, and we won't tell the minister 'bout the way you cussed, neither."

Without answering Captain Tom shamefacedly went below. Ten minutes later the cook asked Bill for the rooster.

This story has no moral. Not that in the eternal fitness of things this should be. It ought to go on record that the pot-pie choked them, but nothing of the kind happened. There is not a point on which a moral can hang.

Captain Tom steered, as was his habit,

while the rest mustered around the cabin table. The cook divided the pot-pie into six sections, and ate his share in the galley. The mate finished his dinner and went up to relieve the skipper, who, not having quite forgiven his "boys," waited before going down until they had finished. An unwise delay!

Three pairs of eyes, lifted from three well-emptied plates, gazed longingly at the remaining share of pot-pie. Glances and grins were exchanged. Then three spoons reached toward the platter, and the captain's dinner was removed. It was shameful.

THE KING OF BOYVILLE

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

THE KING OF BOYVILLE

BOYS who are born in a small town are born free and equal. In the big city it

may be different; there are doubtless good little boys who disdain bad little boys, and

poor little boys who are never to be noticed under any circumstances. But in a small town every boy, good or bad, rich or poor, stands among boys on his own merits. The son of the banker who owns a turning-pole

in the back yard does homage to the baker's boy who can sit on the bar and drop down and catch by his legs; while the good little boy who is kept in wide collars and cuffs by a mistaken mother gazes through the white paling of his father's fence at the troop

headed for the swimming-hole, and pays all the reverence which his dwarfed nature can muster to the sign of two fingers.

In the social order of boys who live in

country towns a boy is measured by what he can do, and not by what his father is. And so Winfield Hancock Pennington, whose boy name was Piggy Pennington, was the King

of Boyville. For Piggy could walk on his hands, curling one foot gracefully over his back, and pointing the other one straight in the air; he could hang by his heels on a flying trapeze; he could chin a pole so many times that no one could count the number; he could turn a somersault in the air from the level ground, both backward and forward; he could "tread" water, and "lay" his hair; he could hit any marble in any ring from "taws" and "knucks" down; and, better than all, he could cut his initials in the ice on skates, and whirl round and round so many times that he looked like an animated shadow, when he would dart away up the stream, his red "comfort" flapping behind him like a laugh of defiance. In the story-books such a boy would be the son of a widowed mother, and turn out very good or very bad; but Piggy was not a story-book boy, and his father kept a grocery store, from which Piggy used to steal so many dates that the boys said his father must have cut up the almanac to supply him. As he never gave the goodies to the other

boys, but kept them for his own use, his name of "Piggy" was his by all the rights of Boyville.

There was one thing Piggy Pennington could not do, and it was the one of all things that he most wished he could do; he could not, under any circumstances, say three consecutive and coherent words to any girl under fifteen and over nine. He was invited, with nearly all the boys of his age in town, to children's parties. And while any other boy, whose only accomplishment was turning a cart-wheel, or skinning the cat backward, or, at most, hanging by one leg and turning a handspring, could boldly ask a girl if he could see her home, Piggy had to get his hat and sneak out of the house when the company broke up. He would comfort himself by walking along the opposite side of the street from some couple, while he talked in monosyllables about a joke which he and the boy knew, but which was always a secret to the girl. Even after school Piggy could not join the select coterie of boys who followed the girls down through town to the post-

office. He could not tease the girls about absent boys at such times, and make up rhymes like

> "First the cat and then her tail;
> Jimmy Sears and Maggie Hale,"

and shout them out for the crowd to hear. Instead of joining the courtly troupe, Piggy

Pennington went off with the boys who really did n't care for such things, and fought, or played "tracks up," or wrestled his way

leisurely home in time to get in his "night wood." But his heart was not in these pastimes. It was with a red shawl of a peculiar shade, that was wending its way to the post-office and back, to a home in one of the few two-story houses in the little town. Time and time again had Piggy tried to make some sign to let his feelings be known, but every time he had failed. Lying in wait for her at corners and suddenly breaking upon her with a glory of backward and forward somersaults did not convey the state of his heart. Hanging by his heels from an apple-tree limb over the sidewalk in front of her, unexpectedly, did not tell the tender tale for which his lips could find no words. And the nearest he could come to an expression of the longing in his breast was to cut her initials in the ice beside his own when she came wobbling past on some other boy's arm. But she would not look at the initials, and the chirography of his skates was so indistinct that it required a key; and, everything put together, poor Piggy was no nearer a declaration at the end of the winter than he had been

at the beginning of autumn. So only one heart beat with but a single thought, and the other took motto candy and valentines and red apples and picture-cards and other tokens of esteem from other boys, and beat on with any number of thoughts, entirely immaterial to the uses of this narrative. But Piggy Pennington did not take to the enchantment of corn-silk cigarettes, and ratan and grape-vine cigars. He tried to sing, and wailed dismal ballads about "The Gipsy's Warning," and "The child in the grave with its mother," and "She 's a daisy, she 's a darling, she 's a dumpling, she 's a lamb," whenever he was in hearing distance of his Heart's Desire, in the hope of conveying to her some hint of the state of his affections; but it was useless. Even when, as he passed her house in the gloaming, he tried to whistle plaintively, his notes brought forth no responsive echo.

One morning in the late spring he spent half an hour before breakfast among his mother's roses, which were just in first bloom. He had taken out there all the wire from an old broom and all his kite-

string. His mother had to call three times before he would leave his work. The youngster was the first to leave the table, and by eight o'clock he was at his task again. Before the first school-bell had rung, Piggy Pennington was bound for the school-house

with a strange-looking parcel under his arm. He tried to put his coat over it, but it stuck out, and the newspaper that was wrapped around it bulged into so many corners that it looked like a home-tied bundle of laundry.

"What you got?" asked the freckle-faced

boy who was learning at Piggy's feet how to do the "muscle-grind" on the turning-pole.

But Piggy Pennington was the King of Boyville, and he had a right to look straight ahead of him as if he did not hear the question, and say, "Lookie here, Mealy, I wish you would go and tell Abe I want him to hurry up, for I want to see him."

"Abe" was Piggy's nearest friend. His other name was Carpenter. Piggy only wished to be rid of the freckle-faced boy. But the freckle-faced boy was not used to royalty and its ways, so he pushed his inquiry.

"Say, Piggy, have you got your red ball-pants in that bundle?"

There was no reply. The freckle-faced boy grew tired of tattooing with a stick as they walked beside a paling fence, so he began touching every tree on the other side of the path with his fingers. They had gone a block when the freckle-faced boy could stand it no longer, and said:

"Say, Piggy, you need n't be so smart

about your old bundle; now, honest, Piggy, what have you got in that bundle?"

"Aw—soft soap; take a bite—good fer your appetite," said the King, as he faced about and drew up his left cheek and lower

eyelid pugnaciously. The freckle-faced boy saw he would have to fight if he stayed, so he turned to go, and said, as though nothing had happened, "Where do you suppose old Abe is anyhow?"

Just before school was called, Piggy Pennington was playing "scrub" with all his

might, and a little girl—his Heart's Desire —was taking out of her desk a wreath of roses tied to a shaky wire frame. There was a crowd of girls round her admiring it, and speculating about the probable author of the gift; but to these she did not show the patent-medicine card on which was scrawled over the druggist's advertisement, "Yours truly, W. H. P."

When the last bell rang, Piggy Pennington was the last boy in, and he did not look toward the desk where he had put the flowers until after the singing. Then he stole a sidewise glance that way, and his Heart's Desire was deep in her geography. It was an age before she filed past him with the "B" class in geography, and took a seat directly in front of him, where he could look at her all the time, unobserved by her. Once she squirmed in her place and looked toward him, but Piggy Pennington was head over heels in the "Iser rolling rapidly." When their eyes did meet at last, just as Piggy, leading the marching around the room, was at the door to go out for recess, the thrill

amounted to a shock that sent him whirling in a pinwheel of handsprings toward the ball-ground, shouting "scrub—first bat, first bat, first bat," from sheer bubbling joy. Piggy made four tallies that recess, and the other boys could n't have put him out if they had used a hand-grenade or a Babcock fire-extinguisher.

He received four distinct shots that day from the eyes of his Heart's Desire, and the last one sent him home on the run, tripping up every primary urchin whom he found tagging along by the way, and whooping at the top of his voice. When his friends met in his barn, some fifteen minutes later, Piggy tried to turn a double somersault from his spring-board, to the admiration of the crowd, and was only calmed by falling with his full weight on his head and shoulders at the edge of the hay, with the life nearly jolted out of his little body.

The next morning Piggy Pennington astonished his friends by bringing a big armful of red and yellow and pink and white roses to school. He had never done this before; and

when he had run the gantlet of the big boys, who were not afraid to steal them from him, he made straight for his school-room, and stood holding them in his hands while the girls gathered about him, teasing for the

beauties. It was nearly time for the last bell to ring, and Piggy knew that his Heart's Desire would be in the room by the time he got there. He was not mistaken. But Heart's Desire did not clamor with the other girls for one of the roses. Piggy

stood off their pleadings as long as he could with "Naw"; "Why, naw, of course I won't"; "Naw; what I want to give you one for?" and "Go away from here, I tell you." Still

Heart's Desire did not ask for her flowers. There were but a few moments left before school would be called to order, and in desperation Piggy gave one rose away. It was

not a very pretty rose, but he hoped she would see that the others were to be given away, and ask for one. But she, his Heart's Desire, stood near a window talking to the freckle-faced boy. Then Piggy gave away one rose after another. As the last bell began to ring he gave them to the boys, as the girls were all supplied. And still she came not. There was one rose left, the most beautiful of all. She went to her desk, and as the teacher came in, bell in hand, Piggy surprised himself, the teacher, and the school by laying the beautiful flower, without a word, on the teacher's desk. That day was a dark day. When a new boy, who did n't belong to the school, came up at recess to play, Piggy shuffled over to him and asked gruffly:

"What 's your name?"

"Puddin' 'n' tame, ast me ag'in an' I 'll tell you the same," said the new boy, and then there was a fight. It did n't soothe Piggy's feelings one bit that he whipped the new boy, for the new boy was smaller than Piggy. And he dared not turn his flushed face toward his Heart's Desire. It was

almost four o'clock when Piggy Pennington walked to the master's desk to get him to work out a problem, and as he passed the desk of Heart's Desire he dropped a note in her lap. It read:

"Are you mad?"

But he dared not look for an answer as they marched out that night, so he contented himself with punching the boy ahead of him with a pin, and stepping on his heels when they were in the back part of the room, where the teacher would not see him. The King of Boyville walked home alone that evening. The courtiers saw plainly that his majesty was troubled.

So his lonely way was strewn with broken stick-horses which he took from the little boys, and was marked with trees adorned with the string which he took from other youngsters who ran across his pathway playing horse. In his barn he sat listlessly on a nail-keg, while Abe and the freckle-faced boy did their deeds of daring on the rings and the trapeze. Only when the new boy came in did Piggy arouse himself to mount the

flying bar, and, swinging in it to the very rafters, drop and hang by his knees, and again drop from his knees, catching his ankle in the angle of the rope where it meets the swinging bar. That was to awe the new boy.

After this feat the King was quiet.

At dusk, when the evening chores were done, Piggy Pennington walked past the home of his Heart's Desire, and howled out a doleful ballad which began:

> "You ask what makes this darky wee-eep,
> Why he like others am not gay."

But a man on the sidewalk, passing, said: "Well, son, that's pretty good; but would n't you just as lief sing as to make that noise?" So the King went to bed with a heavy heart.

He took that heart to school with him the next morning, and dragged it over the school-ground, playing crack-the-whip and "stinkbase." But when he saw Heart's Desire wearing in her hair one of the white roses from his mother's garden—the Penningtons had the only white roses in the

little town—he knew it was from the wreath he had given her, and so light was his boyish heart that it was with an effort that he kept it out of his throat. There were smiles and smiles that day. During the singing they began, and every time she came past him from a class, and every time he could pry his eyes behind her geography or her grammar, a flood of gladness swept over his soul. That night Piggy Pennington followed the girls from the school-house to the post-office, and in a burst of enthusiasm walked on his hands in front of the crowd for nearly half a block.

When his Heart's Desire said, "Oh! ain't you afraid you 'll hurt yourself doing that?" Piggy pretended not to hear her, and said to the boys:

"Aw, that ain't nuthin'; come down to my barn and I 'll do somepin' that 'll make your head swim."

He was too exuberant to contain himself, and when he left the girls he started to run after a stray chicken that happened along, and ran till he was out of breath. He did

not mean to run in the direction his Heart's Desire had taken, but he turned a corner and came up with her suddenly.

Her eyes beamed upon him, and he could

not run away as he wished. She made room for him on the sidewalk, and he could do nothing but walk beside her. For a block they were so embarrassed that neither spoke.

It was Piggy who broke the silence. His words came from his heart. He had not yet learned to speak otherwise.

"Where 's your rose?" he asked, not seeing it.

"What rose?" said the girl, as though she had never in her short life heard of such an absurd thing as a rose.

"Oh, you know," returned the boy, stepping irregularly, to make the tips of his toes come on the cracks in the sidewalk. There was another pause, during which Piggy picked up a pebble and threw it at a bird in a tree. His heart was sinking rapidly.

"Oh, that rose?" said his Heart's Desire, turning full upon him with the enchantment of her childish eyes. "Why, here it is in my grammar. I 'm taking it to keep with the others. Why?"

"Oh, nuthin' much," replied the boy. "I bet you can't do this," he added, as he glowed up into her eyes from an impulsive handspring.

And thus the King of Boyville first set his light little foot upon the soil of an unknown country.

THE MERRY THANKSGIVING OF THE BURGLAR AND PLUMBER

A THANKSGIVING STORY

BY

OCTAVE THANET

THE MERRY THANKSGIVING OF THE BURGLAR AND PLUMBER

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MISS ELINOR MERRYWEATHER went to bed Thanksgiving evening in a graceless frame of mind—at least in a frame of mind that may pass for graceless in a woman of such kindly nature as Miss Merryweather. "You may go, Robbins," she said to her faithful maid, "and you and Harriet" (Harriet was the cook) "and Matilda" (Matilda was the waitress) "may all go to that party at James's" (James was the gardener). "I shall not need any of you."

"I hate to leave you alone, Miss Elinor," said Robbins, and hesitated, knowing Miss

Merryweather well enough not to ask her would she be afraid. She did not do much better to blurt out: "They do say there 's burglars in town, ma'am!"

"Very well," responded Miss Merryweather, with unshaken calm,—whatever her faults, timidity never was charged to her,—"be sure you lock all the doors and windows securely. And you may as well see that the galvanic battery works all right. Good night—a pleasant time to you."

Robbins knew when her mistress used this tone that argument would be vain; so, discomfited, and with more than one wistful glance backward in the hall, she retired.

Miss Merryweather began to walk up and down the room. It was an attractive room, with the soft ivory gleam of the paint, and the sprangly, old-fashioned flowers on the creamy walls. These walls were thickly hung with water-color sketches and pen-and-ink and wash drawings, which gave one an eery sensation of familiarity, like faces seen in a dream; and sometimes, by some clever people of long memories, were traced to a favorite

illustrator, being, in fact, by famous artists, their original drawings for well-known magazines.

One perceived, also, an old-fashioned air, due to the presence of certain chairs and tables, luxuriantly carved in dull-hued oak, or tinted in old marquetry. In one corner of the room a cabinet showed all the dazzling hues of rare old china: the sumptuous gilding of Satsuma, the delicate forms of old Sèvres, the solider opulence of color and shape of the great English makers. A davenport in one corner, a lounge with many pillows in another, and a tea-table with its shining equipage, hinted the room to be Miss Merryweather's own special sitting-room. She never called it a boudoir, and nothing made her more indignant than to hear the name from any one else. "Do *I* look like a woman who would have a *boudoir?*" she had been known to demand, almost with fierceness. "A boudoir is a place where girls with sloppy hair read poetry and write notes on scented paper, and make poor tea that they sip with souvenir spoons. Look at *my* spoons—they

"DO I LOOK LIKE A WOMAN WHO WOULD HAVE A BOUDOIR?"

are truly apostles; and is n't that Eve sprawling by that ridiculous river on that Capo di Monti tea-pot delicious? Taste my tea—a friend brought it to me from Russia; did you ever taste such tea in a *boudoir?* I think not!" Miss Merryweather's tea was celebrated among all who were so fortunate as to drink it; but it was not the tea-table to which the eye of a new-comer instinctively turned—it was a heavy Italian chest, the lid adorned by two curiously wrought iron handles, the chest itself of age-stained oak, having divers vague and grisly traditions connecting it with the treasure of a convent and the murder of faithful guardians by vandal robbers. By a natural divagation of the mind, the chest had become Miss Merryweather's safe, and contained, it was said, a bona-fide iron safe wherein was deposited the famous Merryweather plate, some descended from colonial Merryweathers, some presented by brother officers to the late General Merryweather. Also, therein sparkled the jewels of Miss Merryweather, which would not have been despised in a large city, and were re-

garded with awe in an Iowa town. Miss Merryweather, though a spinster, and no longer young, was fond, on proper occasions, of magnificence in dress. In general she wore simple costumes, always of black, which recognized, but did not slavishly defer to, fashion. But for high toilets she had satins and velvets, and lace as ancient as her china. In person Miss Merryweather was tall and thin; but she had a mantua-maker that understood her business. When she was young, and her hair was black, Miss Merryweather's Roman features might have seemed large, however finely chiseled. Now, framed in softest iron-gray, they were commonly described as "so distinguished." She was of a fine carriage, a figure to notice on the streets, especially as she was a trifle absent-minded, and when she walked had the habit of swaying her shapely right hand from side to side as if addressing an invisible audience in inaudible words. She had a warm heart and a quick temper, and she had been known to arrest (with the aid of sympathetic bystanders) at least half a dozen oppressors of dumb

brutes. She did not keep a single cat in the house. In pussy's place she petted a majestic St. Bernard.

Whatever her eccentricities,—I must grant her some,—she was greatly beloved by her fellow-townsmen, and those who knew her best loved her most strongly. She had, however, a will of her own. And she was one who, in the language of Holy Writ, kept her promise to her hurt. Thus, sometimes, an impetuous temper led her into imprudent declarations, out of which she could not always extricate herself without great exercise of her wits. Her latest dilemma engrossed her to-night. Having had the plumbing of her dwelling repaired, in an unlucky moment there had come a quarrel with the plumbers' union, over a bill. The result was that she sent away "every man swindler of them all,"—I would not be understood to indorse her words,—and was left with the water service of the house cut off, and water hauled from the cisterns and a single faucet in the garden, while friends sniffed apprehensively whenever they entered the house,

and asked her was she not afraid of sewer-gas? And her niece (who was as a daughter to her) did not dare to bring the baby to spend Thanksgiving, because the child might catch diphtheria through the deadly leaking pipes.

"Stuff!" said Miss Merryweather, who used strong expressions sometimes, being by birth and breeding quite too great a lady to disturb herself about the minor conventions. "Stuff and nonsense! There are *no* leaks. But I'm not going to argue with you, Helen; I shall get a plumber and have you come Thanksgiving."

Then, discerning a peculiar smile on the amiable features of Helen's husband, she added gravely, "He will not belong to the union. If I have to wait to hire a union plumber I shall wait until the pipes tumble to pieces!"

But the imported plumber who was to put the forces of organized labor to rout did not come, although, such is the extraordinary working of the feminine logic, he was offered as high wages as the erring and grasping union plumbers had been refused.

Miss Merryweather was sure that he had either been bought off or assassinated by the union. She paid no heed to the theory meekly tendered by Helen's husband, to wit, that, knowing the man's habits, he had cause to suspect he was simply celebrating Thanksgiving in an unholy manner, on his own account.

"No, poor fellow," she murmured; "most likely he is lying dead in some alleyway, with all his ribs broken. They do such things." Therefore it was with a gloomy soul she beheld the night before Thanksgiving. "I never was so little thankful in my life," she murmured, "and I was so bent on having that plumbing done in time to have Helen, and show that Vance that I am a match for the plumbers' union, if I *am* a lone woman." Miss Merryweather was not used to be beaten; it galled. She had mailed letters to different plumbers asking for bids by telegraph; but, peer as she might, she could not see a loophole of escape for herself this time.

She went to bed early, but for a long while she could not sleep. She thought of

the plumbers' union and her own defeat, and raged anew.

And when, at last, she was just slipping off into the shadows of peace, she heard the softest of footfalls. Surely she had closed the door on Diogenes, the dog! *Had n't* she closed the door? Her mind drove her backward over that hasty journey through the rooms down-stairs. Diogenes had a mat in the laundry, and the range of the kitchen. She certainly had closed one of the kitchen doors. *Had n't* she closed the kitchen door up-stairs? She had—at least she had seen that the door to the cellar was fast, and she thought she had bolted the door up-stairs. How did people ever feel certain enough about anything to swear that it happened? The footsteps were nearer, in the sitting-room which adjoined the chamber. Her first thought was for the safety of the tea-table with its precious freight. She was sure if she called to the dog kindly he would begin wagging his tail, that tremendous brush which, with one sweep, might hurl her idols into irredeemable, smashing, crashing ruin!

Sternness was the only chance! "Down, charge, Di!" she commanded. "Bad dog! *Down!*"

A particularly mild voice answered her: "It ain't a dog, miss; it 's a man!"

"A man?" repeated Miss Merryweather. "*Well!*"

Of course it was not well; but Miss Merryweather just then did not think of the nicer meaning of words.

"Yes, ma'am," the voice repeated; "don't be alarmed; I 'm a man—a burglar!"

Miss Merryweather showed no signs of alarm; in the first place, she had a fearless soul; in the second place, the voice was so mild, so almost apologetic, that it aroused her sense of humor.

"I don't know but that you are less of a nuisance than the dog would be," said she. "You stay right where you are, and I will turn on the electric lights. Don't move or you 'll hit something!"

"All right, ma'am," said the burglar; "only no pulling out a pop, you know, and firing it off at me in the dark, hit or miss!"

"Certainly not; at least not until I can see you," said Miss Merryweather. All the while she was hastily donning a wrapper and slippers. Then she turned on the lights.

The burglar stood directly under the blaze. He did not look like a burglar. There was nothing much in his pale face except the look of recent sickness and hopelessness. His clothes were like any workman's, a pair of blue, soiled overalls with something like a bib front, and a patched check shirt. His hat (it was a hat, and not the cap in which artists, for reasons best known to themselves, delight to depict the burglar) was a very battered soft felt, and it was not pulled down over his black brows; it was pushed back from dark-brown locks. He looked like a workman out of a job. His hands, one of which held a pistol, were calloused and stained—a workingman's hands.

When Miss Merryweather loomed upon him—one may say darted, since that was the effect of the springing of the light upon her image—he lifted his empty hand to his hat.

"THE BURGLAR STOOD DIRECTLY UNDER THE BLAZE."

"I don't want to disturb you, ma'am," he repeated, "but I 've *got* to have some money!"

"Why?" said Miss Merryweather. She was quite at her ease and had taken a rocking-chair.

"Why?" the man echoed bitterly. "Because I prefer to steal to see my wife dying for want of things done for her, and my children without shoes to their feet, and never a bite among us all this day, by ——! I beg your pardon, lady; I was n't meaning to swear, but I 'm wore out!"

"Have n't you had anything to eat today?" said Miss Merryweather.

He shook his head. A stiff lock of brown hair which stood up on the top of his head waggled at the motion; it gave him a grotesque look. He certainly was frightfully thin.

"Humph!" said Miss Merryweather. "You sit down in that rocking-chair and stay there until I come up again. Don't you burgle any until I come back; then we 'll see what we can do."

"You ain't going to telephone to the police to nab me?"

Miss Merryweather waved her hand toward the wall at a telephone.

"It is n't customary in houses of people who are not millionaires to have *two* telephones," said she. "I am going to bring you something to eat."

"I won't touch a thing, lady," promised the burglar; "I 've been druv' to this, I truly have."

Miss Merryweather encouraged him by a nod, and departed, lighted candle in hand.

Never, it seemed to her, had she heard so many sinister noises as pricked her ears while her candle flitted from pantry to sideboard. Boards creaked under her tread as they never creaked in the daytime, and every door she touched sent up a long shriek of remonstrance.

But Diogenes slept calmly in the laundry. Miss Merryweather shook her head. She carried a revolver in her hand, which she laid on the tray. "He seems like a decent sort of submerged unfortunate,"—thus ran

her meditations while she provisioned the tray,—"but he may be wicked and run after me down-stairs. If he does, Di and the gun will have to hurt him."

She thought of waking the sleeping dog and taking him up-stairs; but the peril to the china of Diogenes's clumsy bulk seemed so much greater to her intrepid soul than any personal danger from the mild-mannered burglar that she dismissed the suggestion as soon as it appeared. When she entered her sitting-room again, and saw how starved and tired her burglar looked, she was glad of her decision.

He was leaning back in his chair, his pistol still in one limp hand, his head laid back, showing his miserably thin neck, and the white glare full on the haggard pallor of his face.

His eye brightened at the sight of the tray. Miss Merryweather, making no comment, lighted the lamp under the silver chafing-dish, and as it burned she buttered the slices of bread and placed beef between them.

"I am afraid the beef is a little underdone

for your taste," observed she, kindly, "and I hope you don't care for mustard, for I forgot it; but I 've put on salt and pepper, and they were the best-done pieces I could find. The soup will be warm in a minute. Now, you drink this glass of wine."

The man drank it, keeping his eyes on her. Then he laid the pistol on the table. "I ain't going to use it," he said.

"Much better not," returned Miss Merryweather. "The truth is, I have long had a curiosity to see a burglar, and I rather have planned things that way; but I did n't expect he would be so decent as you seem. How do you like that wine? It 's old Jacques port." The burglar looked rather bewildered, but answered that it was the best wine he had ever tasted. He added ingenuously that he had "not tasted much wine."

"You are not at all like a professional burglar," remarked the lady, who had now come to ladling out the steaming soup; "I think you must be an amateur."

"I never touched a thing 't was n't my own before, lady, so help me ——!"

"Well, you have n't touched anything *yet*, now," interrupted Miss Merryweather, who had a mania for accuracy. She continued: "I suppose you are putting that sandwich into your pocket for your family—don't do it! I 'll make you up a basket for them. Tell me what brought you, such a decent man, to this pass?"

The man smeared his eyes with his hand before he began. "I never seen a lady like you," said he; "I 'm just going to tell you the honest truth. I was working in Chicago. I belonged to the junior plumbers—"

"Oh, if you were a plumber it must have come natural to you to rob!"

The burglar acknowledged the sally by a faint smile. "We ain't so bad as they make us out. Well, hard times came and work fell off, and the union would n't let us work below wages, so I left the union—fact is, I could n't keep up my dues—"

"Do you mean to tell me," cried Miss Merryweather, springing from her chair in strong agitation—"do you mean to tell me you are not a union man? Don't think of

"DO YOU MEAN TO TELL ME YOU ARE NOT A UNION MAN?"

burgling me! I can give you a great deal better job, and I will advance you money on it, too. This house is only about half plumbed; if you will take hold and get this plumbing done by six o'clock to-morrow, I 'll pay you *well!* And you shall have two men to help you who are n't plumbers, but have some sense; and a boy to run to the shop to get the tools. Are you a *good* plumber?"

"Yes 'm, I *was;* but, you see, I went to Pullman and worked there till the strike came. I did n't strike, but I joined the A. R. U. afterward, so as to get the relief. The strike lasted so long I used up all my savings, and then I did n't get back after all. So I 'm a little out of practice. But I guess I can satisfy you. I 'll try hard."

"You shall have a chance anyhow. So you went to Pullman; and why did n't you get back there when the strike ended?"

"They did n't take all the men, ma'am; and I heard of a job in Chicago, so I moved there, and I got it sure enough, but it only lasted a little while; and then I wrote to the new factory they was starting here, the glucose-

works, and I got a job, but the first week I come down with typhoid fever, and I worked with the fever on me; and I did take whisky to kinder hold me up, for I was wild to think of losing my job; but I was n't drunk, though somebody said so. So I lost it and another feller got it—well, I guess he needed it bad, too. But that 's how it was. I went home and was sick awful bad for six weeks, and when I got up again there was nothing I could get; and the baby come just then, God forgive it! and I guess he knowed he was none too welcome, for he 's been hollering ever since. Doctor says he needs some kinder food, nestling food, or some sich name, and I wanted to git it, for I someway don't jest want him to die, if he *is* mean! Then I wanted to git my woman things; she 's an awful nice woman, I 'll say that, and about all we 've got she 's earned washing. I 've been out a week, walking about a hundred miles, I guess, begging for a job everywhere I heard jobs were to be had; but you see we were strangers, and there ain't enough work to go round 'mong the old

men. To-day, as I went back from the shoe-factory 'cross the river, and seen all the turkeys in the winders, and remembered how there was n't a bite in our house for to-day nor for to-morrow, and looked at the rich folks that don't love their families a mite better 'n I love mine, I got kinder wild, I guess. I never had gredged rich folks their money before. I was willing to work hard and not to have very much; but now it seems as if there was n't an inch of room for me and my family on this earth. We 'd pawned every last thing we could pawn, and there we was—a-starving!"

"But, goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Merryweather, who had with difficulty refrained from interrupting him before, "why did n't you go to the Associated Charities or to the Industrial Aid?"

"You see, lady, we ain't used to being poor; we did n't know about them places. Lady, I tell you, it ain't the poverty poor that gits squeezed the hardest when there 's hard times; bless you, no! They 're used to leanin' on other folks, and they just lop over a leetle

heavier. But it 's the decent folks that never knew the way to the poor-overseer's office before, or even to the pawnshop, that catch it. They suffer and don't holler about it."

"I see," said Miss Merryweather; "go on!"

"There ain't much more," said the man, very neatly folding the napkin. "I told my wife I had got a job and I would have the money for a turkey to-morrow; not to fret, I 'd git some advanced. I went straight out, meaning to enter somebody's house and git enough to buy a Thanksgiving dinner. I prowled about for a long time, first deciding on one house and then on another. By and by I saw all the folks in your kitchen going out, and the light up-stairs, and says I, 'That lady is all alone by herself, and I can git some money easy.' So I come."

"But how did you get in? The windows are barred down-stairs—"

"Yes 'm; they look like good winders; but I come in by the door—the kitchen door. I reasoned like the girls would have some place where they hid the kitchen key, and I could

hunt it up. Most like it would be under the door-mat. That 's where it was, too."

"They shall have a latch-key, every one of them; of course you got in. But did n't you wake the dog?"

"No, ma'am; he jest slept like the dead. Them big dogs is jest like men about sleeping, they sleep so sound."

"But when you came up the stairs what did you do about the mat at the foot of the stairs? The lights ought to have sprung up and the bells rung the instant your foot touched the mat!"

"Why, you see, lady," said the burglar, apologetically,—he seemed to fear lest she should be hurt by the failure of her carefully planned burglar-traps,—"you see, I naturally struck a match now and then to see my way, and when I come on that plain, common mat in that beautiful hall with the handsome rugs about, I knowed it to be a burglar-mat, so I jest stepped over it. I 've no doubt all the things would have happened if I had stepped *on* it right."

"I don't know," said Miss Merryweather,

gloomily; "maybe the plumbers got it out of order. But come here; open that chest!"

She pointed to the nuns' chest against the wall, and the burglar obediently laid his pistol down to do her bidding. An inner chest of iron was disclosed, having two projecting handles.

"Lift the cover," commanded Miss Merryweather.

A smile of grim expectation parted her firm lips; now approached *her* triumph. The burglar laid his hands on the knobs, and pensively nodded his head, screwing up his mouth like a man recognizing a familiar flavor.

"Yes'm," said he; "galvanic battery, ain't it? Kinder prickly!"

"I 'll weaken the current," said Miss Merryweather; "you must be a perfect Spartan not to call out."

"Well, you see, I ruther suspicioned what it was," the burglar replied, letting his hands drop.

"*How can you get your hands away?*" cried Miss Merryweather.

"Hain't you weakened the current?" deprecated the burglar. "Pshaw! I thought you had, or I would n't 'a' taken them down. I 'm real sorry."

Miss Merryweather laughed. "Everything is a failure," said she. "You *ought* to be held a prisoner, with your shoulders hunched up. It 's all wrong."

"Oh, no, it ain't, ma'am," the burglar tried to reassure her. "I ain't no manner of doubt that them mats down-stairs would work splendid; we kin try going down. But these here galvanic batteries are mighty unreliable. Never mind, I kin fix it all right for you. I 'm glad I came, though."

"So am I," said Miss Merryweather. "Do you think something is the matter with this too?"—displaying her revolver.

It was a big revolver of glossy and iridescent black, not a feminine frippery about it —no pearl, no silver; a revolver that meant business and showed its intentions honorably.

"No, it 's all right," said the burglar, admiringly; "you could 'a' plugged me sure."

"Unless you shot me first."

"Humph! that would 'a' been difficult, seein' mine ain't loaded and there 's something the matter with the trigger so it can't go off, else it would 'a' been in the pawnshop 'stead of here."

"Well," sighed Miss Merryweather, "it 's a mercy you tried to burgle *me* with that useless thing, instead of some one else. Now, for goodness sake come down-stairs and let me give you that basket and get you off before the servants come."

Miss Merryweather had very much the sensations of a burglar in her own house, as she despoiled the larder, the friendly burglar holding the candle. They hurried at every glimpse of the clock, they trembled at all the creakings of the floor.

"Robbins never did stay out before later than twelve or one; it 's a quar— Great heavens!" Miss Merryweather jumped. Suddenly she was bathed in a flood of light, and bells seemed to be ringing all over the house!

"I guess the mats is straight goods," said the burglar; "you trod on it by mistake,

ma'am. Say, what 's that? They 're a-hollering in the yard! I 'll try this door—"

"No, you will not," said Miss Merryweather, all herself again; "you will stay just where you are while I open the door."

She was at the hall door before she ended, calling loudly to the shrieking maids, who came in timidly (except Robbins), in the rear of the two men, who were none too valorous.

"Nothing is the matter," said Miss Merryweather; "I stepped on the mat myself. It works perfectly. Harriet, I 've engaged a plumber, and he is to work all night, and the plumbing will be done by to-morrow afternoon. If you need those extra tools, you better go home and get them now,"—turning upon the bewildered burglar,—"and you don't need that candle any more; put it down. Don't forget the basket."

"No, ma'am, thank you, ma'am," the burglar responded meekly, "and I 'll be back—"

"As soon as you can; there 's no time to lose," said Miss Merryweather. "He is a good plumber," she announced calmly to her dazed

domestic staff, "and I was lucky to get him. I have sent a basket of things to his family. Get him a good breakfast to-morrow morning, and I hope we shall have a Thanksgiving after all. I sha'n't forget how good you all are in these emergencies."

The household knew too well Miss Merryweather's generosity, for these special efforts, to be unhappy; but Robbins summed up the general mixture of disapprobation and admiration. She said: "Did you ever see the like! I believe Miss Elinor would git her will if she had to tear the world up by the roots!"

The plumbing was done, and well done, by four of the next afternoon. The burglar's family, as well as the Merryweather gathering, dined late that Thanksgiving.

I cannot find any good moral in this tale, unless it be contained in Miss Merryweather's own subsequent reflections. "Now, are n't the ways of Providence queer? Here 's my burglar got a good plumber shop and lots of custom, simply by an unsuccessful attempt to rob. But then it is a merciful thing that, as our best intentions are liable to

bring harm and misfortune, so our bad ones run off the track sometimes, too. And, anyhow, it was n't because he was a burglar he was so lucky, but because he was such a remarkably gentle and propitiating burglar! If he had n't been I should have had to shoot him or 'sic' Diogenes on him. I hope it will be a lesson to us both that it is better far to rule by love than fear, and kind words can never die, and all that kind of thing! And it was certainly a mercy to *me* that I feel truly thankful for. I don't know how I *could* have beaten the plumbers without him!"

THE ROMANCE OF DULLTOWN

BY

JAMES W. TEMPLE

THE ROMANCE OF DULLTOWN

I

DULLTOWN, as any tyro in geography can tell, is a village of a few hundred inhabitants, situated on the line of the X. X. L. Railroad, in the County of Blank, and State of Incognito. To describe it as a real-estate agent would do, it is the center of a fine agricultural region, and a trading-point of no mean order, judged by the staples shipped from its depot and the merchandise sold by its several "stores" to the country people located near it. It has the regulation supply of shops, offices, and warehouses; its churches, its schools, its fine residences and humble cottages. It numbers among its population its rich

man, its well-to-do tradesmen, its day-laborers, its loafers. It has its preachers, its doctors, its teachers; it has its local politicians, its office-seekers, its cranks, its weather-prophets, its orators for Fourth of July demands and other great occasions. It has its little local squabbles, its professional jealousies, its commercial rivalries. It has its milliners, its dressmakers, its fashionable coteries and their humble imitators. It has its elections, on which days society is stirred to its profoundest depths by the struggles of Smith, Brown, and Jones to become constable, justice, assessor, or collector. It also takes a live part in greater affairs, and sends its three or four delegates to county conventions with commendable punctuality.

If, all these pointers having been given, the intelligent reader cannot locate the village or town in the writer's mind, he must be dull indeed. He can have no more data from me. It is quite possible, however, that different persons will locate it differently as I go on with an analysis of some of the peculiarities of its prominent citizens.

First, that we may show a proper respect for wealth, let us commence with the rich man of the town.

This important personage, who has now retired from active commercial pursuits, and is in the enjoyment of a dignified old age, came to the County of Blank in its early settlement. Having a little money and much shrewdness, he decided that breaking prairie and raising stock was a slow way to wealth; so he established a country store, where he could enjoy a monopoly of the trade, and whatever percentage he chose to ask on his sales, which simplified merchandizing very much in those early days. He also invested some spare money in buying tax titles, having the good luck thereby to become the owner of several pieces of land forfeited by their former owners, under pressure of the times, to the inevitable tax laws. He also gave credit, and even made small loans at big interest to several farmers who owned exceptionally good farms in his vicinity, but were poor calculators, and when the times of settlement came and the

debtors failed to pay, further obliged them by extending the time, on their executing certain mortgages to secure the same, which mortgages generally swallowed farms and improvements when the times got bad, as they usually did in those days. These farms, thus falling into his hands, he either sold again, partly on time, with mortgage to secure the balance, or rented to tenants, taking, to secure the rent, chattel mortgages on the crops and teams of his renters, so that, let crops succeed or fail, he was safe, and in fact a failure of buyer or tenant was better to him than their success. So in a few years he quit merchandizing, and set up as banker, —loaned money, shaved notes, bought and sold farms,—and is now retired from active business, unless collecting rents and cutting coupons be called such, and is reaping the rewards of a well-spent life in the deference and dependence of hosts of his old neighbors, though some are ill-natured enough to associate his name with that of one Shylock of Shaksperian memory; but there are envious

men everywhere, as also there are men who *will* call a spade a spade.

It would give me great pleasure to go on describing other residents of Dulltown if I did not fear to bore the reader. I should like to describe its one lawyer, whose principal forte it was to stir up litigation in the neighborhood. I should like to sketch the two justices of the peace, dignified as owls, and as ignorant of law, but with fairly good judgment to get at the equity of cases, unless befogged by the lawyers. I should like to describe the preachers, who, filling their several appointments, came every two years full of energy and purpose to do much good, but who found themselves confronted at the start by quarrelsome cliques within their own churches, and petty jealousies, bickerings, and scandals without, which neutralized their best efforts at reform, while social life had its castes, its "sets," and its ostracisms, which no merit in the individual nor interest in the cause could combat. I could describe also that ubiquitous person-

age, the "fast" young man, who punctually put in an appearance every evening at the corner restaurant, or ogled young ladies on their way to church, who, in spite of the care of the authorities, found means to keep his flask filled—and emptied—every day, and became eloquent and melodious frequently, as well as erratic in his locomotion on Saturday evenings; also that class of hangers-on of the village who seemed to have no visible means of support—those unsolved conundrums of every community, who "toil not, neither do they spin," but yet contrive to keep fat and sleek.

I could describe another class—most active in the village life of Dulltown—that class of self-constituted censors of public morals, whose duty and pleasure it seems to be to watch over the affairs of other people, much gratified to find a screw loose or a flaw somewhere in the running-gears of the social machine. Indeed, so zealous do they become that they grow prophetic, predicting evils they can't see, and, like the shrewd dentist in his work, if they find no cavities try to

make them. They have capital noses for faults; they assign discreditable causes for actions, good or bad; if frailty claim a victim they "suspicioned it long ago"; if misfortune overtake a neighbor they had looked for it from his foolish management. To be first to unearth a slander, and to variegate it with fanciful decorations, is, as Scott says, the "very skimming of their life's cream."

But all these pointers will help the reader little to locate Dulltown. There are several villages we know of possessed of like citizens, and the reader will feel like calling the writer to time, and bidding him quit generalities and "drive on with his wagon."

Well, Dulltown had its romance. Start not, incredulous reader! It is not alone the unexpected, but the improbable, that happens. Was it "probable" that a tanner of Galena or a sheriff of Buffalo, a rail-splitter of Illinois or a canal-boat boy of Ohio, would fill the world's highest places? Was any "good" expected to "come out of Nazareth"? So a romance is possible anywhere, even in Dulltown. For the ingredients of

romance are everywhere if properly mixed. What are they? Youth, love, ambition, hope, success. Given a poor but gallant youth for a lover; a lovely, romantic maiden with regulation blue or hazel or dark eyes; a hard, worldly father; opportunity in the shape of "village sociables," or other leveling and democratic assemblages, where "the rich and the poor meet together," and "the Lord is the maker of them all," as the Bible says, to illustrate the leveling function of such meetings, and you have material for a romance, even in the Dulltowns of the world.

So we will prepare to mix our ingredients. Perhaps the incantation of Macbeth's witches would be a good introduction: "Double, double, toil and trouble." But it needs no mystic rhyme. "Trouble" will "double" fast enough of its own motion in such cases as this. But we will artfully adjourn our story here to the next chapter.

II

THE widow Brown moved into Dulltown one cold day in November of I forget what

year. But no matter. "Time is not the essence of my contract." It is more essential to say that the widow Brown was, as a neighbor said, "poor as p'ison." (This neighbor was of the class before mentioned, who deemed it their special duty to know just how poor their new neighbor was.) But poor she was, there 's no denying, else she had not taken such a poor house on a back street of Dulltown, and immediately given out that she wanted work to keep her family, consisting of herself and three children. She proved to be a good needlewoman, and soon obtained work enough to keep the wolf from the door, which is easier to do in the West, even where wolves are plenty, than in big Eastern cities, they say.

Then she sent her two biggest children to school. John, her oldest hopeful, was a sturdy, rollicking, ragged "chunk of a boy" of twelve, ragged but clean and well groomed, and somehow his rags did n't "sit heavy on his soul," to the inculcating of undue humility, for before the first school-day was over he had "licked" the son of the

principal merchant in the place for making some "profane and facetious remarks," as Nasby would say, on the cut and quality of his (Johnny Brown's) trousers and jacket. The fact that the merchant's boy was a year his senior, and the bully of the school, at once made young Johnny "loved, feared, and respected" by his mates—a condition some philosopher pronounces the most desirable one possible in this vale of tears. At all events, Johnny's ragged jacket did n't ostracize him in the school, and on the playground a certain indefinable quality of leadership asserted itself, but in so pleasant and jolly a way that very few felt called upon to make head against it.

Then Johnny Brown had a peculiar and original way of mastering his school-books that was rather remarkable in Dulltown. For it had been customary there, as elsewhere, for pupils to depend on their teachers to "punch 'em up," as the directors expressed it, and they had got so used to the punching-up process, and had considered it so good-natured on their part toward their teachers

to learn at all, even with all the encouragement those unfortunates could give them, that they looked on Johnny's *voluntary* learning of a lesson as little less than "flat burglary," and some of the boldest took occasion to remonstrate with him for truckling so much to "old Whackem," the master. But Johnny had his own notions on this as on most matters. Besides, he had a little mother at home whom he cared more to please than all the people of Dulltown combined, and this unreasonable little body had, despite her poverty, presumed to entertain hopes and ambitions for her curly-headed boy that would have shocked the placid brains of her neighbors almost into mental activity had they known of them. And at the base of her plans in the boy's behalf lay a thorough education. She knew that this, of all earthly attainments, is the greatest leveler of human distinctions, the greatest help for poverty to rise to rank and affluence, and she, a poor needlewoman, and on occasion a washwoman, had the audacity to hope (within her own bosom) for such a career for her

Johnny as would have surprised, and, indeed, ill pleased, some of her patrons, to whom he brought home budgets of work done by his hard-working mother.

But we will skip five years in our narrative, only stopping to observe that our hero, Johnny Brown, had in that growing period shot up from a sturdy, curly-headed urchin of twelve to a rather tall, awkward youngster of seventeen, as self-reliant but much more bashful than on the day he entered school at Dulltown. It was his good luck that the school was presided over during those years by a really capable teacher, who accepted John's unusual capacity as a relief from the pond of mediocrity in which he was condemned to paddle, and had extended the range of his studies much beyond the usual limits of a district school. To compensate for this out-of-hours instruction Johnny had hoed out the "professor's" garden, chopped wood for him winters, and generally paid back in such currency as he had in hand for the loan of books, mostly

mathematical, and of practical value to a young man who had it in view to "make his brains help his hands." For John was what is called a "handy lad" with tools, and what he lost in the opinion of the Dulltown folk on the score of being a crank about "book-l'arnin'," he partly redeemed by his skill in making a bob-sled, or repairing his mother's fences and sheds. And now, on the last day of school, if we will listen to a little talk as he is packing up his books to leave the old school-house forever, we may gather something of the true "inwardness" of the boy and future man from his conversation with a schoolmate nearly as old as himself, but certainly a thousand times prettier. She is the youngest daughter of the aforesaid rich man of the village, and we will call her Mary Van Gould, which is not a bit like her real name, but hath a moneyed sound to it, and will pass as well as another.

"Well, John," she is saying, "I suppose to-day ends your school-days among us"—this with a half-suppressed sigh and a rather

suspicious downcasting of a pair of telltale eyes, which the owner is determined shall tell nothing.

"Yes, Miss Van Gould," John replies, "I guess I 'll have to quit studying and go to work. I should have done so a year ago, but mother wanted me to finish up surveying and trigonometry, and I was weak enough besides to hate to leave the school for more reasons than one," he sheepishly added. If he had been a little bolder-eyed he might have seen a little flush and pleased smile on Mary's face as she suddenly turned away to pick up a book she did n't want a bit. But just then *he*, too, was blushing, and as anxious to hide his confusion as the lady, so no harm came of it.

But, as usual, the lady recovered herself first. "And what 's your program next, John?" she asked, with an attempted indifference in her tone that was n't a very brilliant success, for a suspicious moisture in her eyes made her turn round again to hunt for another book. (Oh, fie! what would Mrs. Grundy of Dulltown, or what would the

stately father, the gold-spectacled, dignified ex-banker and present millionaire have thought to have seen that tear?)

But nobody saw it, and, as I said before, no harm was done. And John went on blunderingly to tell that he hoped to obtain employment in a machine-shop in a neighboring city. He *had* thought of going to college, but lack of means, and a desire to help the folks at home a little, had determined him to seek paying work with such a chance of promotion as he might deserve. "I have taxed my mother's slender purse too long," he said, though everybody knew he had helped her every way he could, and only continued in school so long at her urgent prayer; "and now," said he, "I feel like trying my fate and seeing whether there 's anything in me that pluck and push will work out."

"Oh, John, I 'm *sure* there is!" the girl answered eagerly, and then blushed at her own forward defense. "And," she continued, "you may be sure that—that you have friends here who will pray—who will

heartily wish you all success, and believe in you to the end."

Now if John had been a little more forward, and pressed things skilfully, he might, in that girl's impressible mood, have got something more explicit; but nothing was farther from his hopes and wishes. He was a poor boy, with his place in the world to make. He had nothing to offer. The pretty girl before him, generous and kindly as she was, was as far separated from him as the antipodes. He had helped her in her lessons, school-boy fashion. He had on one occasion stood between her and considerable danger, when a herd of Texas steers were charging through the street where she was walking to school—a thing he thought little of, as, stick in hand, he got between her and a vicious steer that developed hostile intentions toward her red shawl. But when a sound lick on the horns with a good shillalah had changed the brute's mind and sent him after the rest of the herd, Mary, pale as death, looked on the handsome youngster as a real hero. Well, perhaps he was, as heroes

go, but heroes of romance are not generally painted in shirt-sleeves, with a torn straw hat on their heads, and in patched trousers. No, she must have been mistaken. Yet the silly girl could n't get it out of her mind (and heart) that he *was* a hero, and school-girls take to heroes as ducks to water, as all the world knows.

Well, John and Mary parted there with a hand-shake and a good-by, as hundreds of Johns and Marys have and will, and Mary went home to her father's elegant mansion to dream of heroes and stout boys with sticks in their hands standing between her and danger, and then of tall, bashful youths with unmistakable sprouting mustachios and handsome eyes, albeit they but furtively glance from under a rather fluffy hat. And John went out into the big world with a brave heart, to try and prove himself a man.

III

TIME flies. Gentle reader, this is not an original remark. In fact, its authorship is

lost in the mists of antiquity, though there has not been an age in which the essential fact it records has not been repeated in varied shape, all either reasserting or moralizing upon the fugacious character of time.

So we will suppose the old high-flier to have made the circuit of three years. Dulltown has held the even tenor of its way while the seasons and the almanac have marked every citizen of that placid village three years older. No, not all. There are certain persons whose age does not always tally with the almanac or the family record, that is, the age they give to a curious public. These individuals, unmarried ladies generally, sometimes fail to note the earth's revolutions round the sun; but the "whirligig of time brings in his revenges," and he has a subtle engraver who fails not to mark his work on cheek and brow.

But to our heroine, Mary Van Gould, time was nothing but kind. Since she had been a school-girl he had much improved her form, filled her cheeks, and painted them the most approved color; had given her eyes

more beauty and expression, though of a more sad and thoughtful kind; and her mind had overcome the depressing influence of Dulltown society. She was the companion and joy of her father, who lacked companionship sadly since his wife had sickened and died—a prey to the universal stagnation, some said. It is a sad sight when man and wife are not society for each other. This pair had never been. He had married her for her wealth, but he got no companionship, for, though a good woman, her mind was weak and uncultivated. His library was nothing to her, nor his conversation, being often beyond her range. God help the man and wife who have no common interests to bind them together, yet are doomed to pass their lives thrown upon themselves for society!

But Mary took the place his wife was unfitted for, and became his pride, his joy, his all, as she grew older. Need it be said he grew anxious about her marrying and leaving him alone some day? And yet he was comforted by noting that, while she was pleasant and kind to all, no "bright, particu-

lar star" seemed to rise over her horizon; no one more than another of the youth of Dulltown received favor at her hands. And the old millionaire wondered at this not a little. She was young, healthy, fair, and his destined heiress. And yet she was entering her nineteenth year with a heart as indifferent as when a school-girl to those attractions which mean so much to young girls generally.

But one day his eyes were opened, for he had sharp eyes where his interests were touched. For one day Johnny Brown came home from New York to visit his mother and the scenes of his youth. He had gone away a stalwart lad; he came back a handsome, manly youth of past twenty, with the marks of toil and success plainly to be read on his person and in his air. Those hands had been intimate with hammer and wrench, bar and lever. His eyes had the mechanical cast soon acquired by the worker in metals, his arms the muscle of the athlete. He was a fine specimen of an intelligent American machinist, and no mother could have taken back to

her arms a manlier or a more welcome wanderer from the home of his youth.

Well, John stayed at home a few weeks visiting his friends, and welcomed by all, both as a relief from the monotony of Dulltown, and from the really friendly feeling with which every community welcomes back those who go out into the world and play a manly part therein. And there was no more appreciative or closely observant acquaintance than the ex-banker, Mr. Van Gould. His judgment of men was shrewd and unerring. He took pains to engage John in conversation, to question him on matters of business, of observation, of principle, of opinion. In fact, in his quiet way he had thoroughly "sized up" our hero before the latter mistrusted that it was *he* instead of his news Mr. Van Gould was weighing. And after John had gone back to his duties in New York to take up again his life's work, nobody in Dulltown ever suspected that the shrewd old man had inventoried him and laid him away labeled for future reference.

But of this hereafter. John and Mary

met, of course, during those precious few weeks, and as it is not in our plan to give details of love-making, which you can get from any well-constructed modern novel, I will only say that before they parted they were sworn lovers, and this despite the fact that there was a million or so dollars between them.

But they mutually agreed that it would be better not to let their engagement be known. They dreaded the opposition of her father; they knew the barrier fate had placed between them, and knew, also, that many years must elapse before young Brown could hope, with the best luck, to win means enough to demand the millionaire's daughter with any prospect of success.

So it was a sad parting, but courageous on both sides. Yet "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." It was not many months before the keen eyes of the father noted a care-worn look on his daughter's pretty face, and the fact that this look became more marked after the advent of the mails. He took the precaution to step to the post-office himself

for the family mail, which his daughter had generally brought, and he noticed that when letters bearing a New York postmark were received by her, they were succeeded by a nervous depression she took much pains to hide.

So he proceeds to take his measures with a diabolical cunning worthy of a Malvolio. He first makes an errand to the widow Brown's cottage. He contracts for the making of some articles of clothing, and as he is about leaving, asks: "Ah, by the way, do you hear anything from your son John lately, madam?" He is surprised to see the widow burst into tears, and to hear her tell that a fire in his employer's factory had destroyed the plant, and all his own investment as a part-owner of the stock therein, leaving John broken up as well as thrown out of employment. And the good lady was surprised to see a hard smile pass over the millionaire's stern face, a smile of gratified malice, she was sure, and she could be sworn she heard a laugh as he stumbled down-stairs, and a remark that "it served

them right, trying to deceive her old gray-haired father!"

And here "The Romance of Dulltown" properly commences, and we will warrant it to be the "first and only" romance of the kind ever recorded, so far as our researches in the much-trodden fields of fiction reveal. For what does that inhuman parent do? He seizes her next letter, breaks the seal, reads the direction, and, I shame to say it, the contents, which were as follows:

"NEW YORK, July 4, 18—.

"DEAREST MARY: Since I wrote you last week my affairs have taken a still more decided turn for the worse. I had hope at that date, as I told you, that my partners might save enough out of the wreck to enable us to rebuild and go on with our work; but since then, by the defection of one and the indebtedness of another, our enterprise is dead beyond hope.

"Dear Mary, I write this in more pain than you can imagine. It is not the loss itself that crushes me, but the utter hopelessness

of starting again with a reasonable chance of succeeding in a good many years. I will not deceive you. I am ruined financially, beyond hope of recovery until after long years of toil, and perhaps disappointment in the end. I cannot as an honorable man ask you to wait for me. When I *had* a bright prospect ahead of me, with the promise you gave me to cheer and uphold me, no man ever worked harder or more hopefully. Now I see no prospect of succeeding, and, dear as you are to me, bound up in every hope, ambition, or dream of happiness I have had on earth for years, I cannot hold you to a promise to which your heart, more than your best judgment, prompted you. Dear Mary, I give that promise back. It would be wronging you, wronging your father, nay, it would be wronging myself, to hold you on for years, hoping against hope, till the best part of your life had been lost to you, and the roses had faded from your cheeks and the joy from your life.

"Mary, God only knows the pain with which I give you up! Your image has been

before me ever since I left the school where we parted on the last day of the term, when I was to go forth, a green boy, to fight my way in the world. And when you so kindly gave me your 'God-speed' I went out to my task as bravely as ever went belted knight to win honor or his lady's favor. I knew, even then, what you were to me; but I trust I had honor enough not to try to commit you, who were so much above me in station, to any words which might seem to bind you, although even then I hoped you might not be indifferent to me. But when I seemed to be in a sure way to rise in the world; when I came back to Dulltown and found you so much lovelier than I had ever dreamed of, and, better still, as true and good as you were fair, I felt that such good fortune was beyond my deserts, that it could not be that a poor widow's son was the chosen lover of such a one as my Mary! It was too good to hope or believe, and I fear it was better than I deserved, for the fates have but given me a view of the Promised Land, to hide it again in clouds where no ray of light can penetrate.

"Dear Mary, you are free. Forget me and be happy. Or remember me as one who, while he would gladly die to secure your happiness, cannot deceive you with vain hopes into wasting your youth waiting for

"Your ruined and hopeless bankrupt,

"JOHN BROWN."

This he reads with many a "hem," and has to wipe his glasses two or three times, because either his indignation or some other feeling is getting away with him. Then closing the letter and sealing it carefully, that his much-abused daughter may not suspect that it has been tampered with, he sits down and in cold blood writes to the lover of that daughter a letter, of which the following is a copy:

"DULLTOWN, BLANK COUNTY,

"STATE OF ——.

"JOHN BROWN, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR: Having found out—nomatter how, but not from my unnatural daughter—that you and she have conspired to rob me of the one treasure I value in this world,

but also that you, a co-conspirator as aforesaid, have acted what the world might call an honorable part therein; now this is to inform you that, as long as you two are so silly as to like each other, and as I find you to be a bright and honorable young fellow, you have my full consent to marry whenever you choose, with an old man's blessing to boot. But I make it one of the conditions precedent, that if you *will* go into your dirty manufacturing business, it shall be in this county, where I can live near you and still attend to my business.

"N. B. My daughter shall receive a check for one hundred thousand dollars on the day of her marriage, which I hope will be soon, for I want to see the roses bloom in those pretty cheeks again before Christmas.

"P. S. You thought you were very clever, did n't you? Why, bless your silly hearts, I knew all about it ages ago! So come home, Johnny, and I 'll have the fatted calf hung up by the heels ready for the prodigal's return.

"Your future father-in-law,

"THOMAS VAN GOULD."

And thus ended "The Romance of Dulltown," or rather there it began in reality, for a jollier and a more perfectly happy family than the Van Gould-Brown connection would be hard to find in this world of bank failures, mail robberies, and general "cussedness." "Long may they wave!"

FAIRY GOLD

BY

MARY STEWART CUTTING

FAIRY GOLD

WHEN Mr. William Belden walked out of his house one wet October evening and closed the hall door carefully behind him, he had no idea that he was closing the door on all the habits of his maturer life, and entering the borders of a land as far removed from his hopes or his imagination as the country of the Gadarenes.

He had not wanted to go out that evening at all, not knowing what the fates had in store for him, and being only too conscious of the comfort of the sitting-room lounge, upon which, after the manner of the suburban resident who traveleth daily by railways, he had cast himself immediately after the evening meal was over. The lounge

was in proximity—yet not too close proximity—to the lamp on the table, so that one might have the pretext of reading to cover closed eyelids and a general oblivion of passing events. On a night when a pouring rain splashed outside on the pavements and the tin roofs of the piazzas, the conditions of rest in the cozy little room were peculiarly attractive to a man who had come home draggled and wet, and with the toil and wear of a long business day upon him. It was therefore with a sinking of the heart that he heard his wife's gentle tones requesting him to wend his way to the grocery to purchase a pound of butter.

"I hate to ask you to go, William, dear, but there really is not a scrap in the house for breakfast, and the butter-man does not come until to-morrow afternoon," she said deprecatingly. "It really will only take you a few minutes."

Mr. Belden smothered a groan, or perhaps something worse. The butter question was a sore one, Mrs. Belden taking only a stated quantity of that article a week, and always

unexpectedly coming short of it before the day of replenishment, although no argument ever served to induce her to increase the original amount for consumption.

"Cannot Bridget go?" he asked weakly, gazing at the small, plump figure of his wife as she stood with meek yet inexorable eyes looking down at him.

"Bridget is washing the dishes, and the stores will be closed before she can get out."

"Can't one of the boys—" He stopped. There was in this household a god who ruled everything in it, to whom all pleasures were offered up, all individual desires sacrificed, and whose best good was the greedy and unappreciative juggernaut before whom Mr. Belden and his wife prostrated themselves daily. This idol was called the children. Mr. Belden felt that he had gone too far.

"William!" said his wife severely, "I am surprised at you. John and Henry have their lessons to get, and Willy has a cold; I could not think of exposing him to the night air, and it is so damp, too!"

Mr. Belden slowly and stiffly rose from his

reclining position on the sofa. There was a finality in his wife's tone before which he succumbed.

The night air *was* damp. As he walked along the street the water slopped around his feet and ran in rills down his rubber coat. He did not feel as contented as usual. When he was a youngster, he reflected with exaggerated bitterness, boys were boys, and not treated like precious pieces of porcelain. He did not remember as a boy ever having any special consideration shown him, yet he had been both happy and healthy, healthier perhaps than his overtended brood at home. In his day it had been popularly supposed that nothing could hurt a boy. He heaved a sigh over the altered times, and then coughed a little, for he had a cold as well as Willy.

The streets were favorable to silent meditation, for there was no one out in them. The boughs of the trees swished backward and forward in the storm, and the puddles at the crossings reflected the dismal yellow glare of the street-lamps. Every one was

housed to-night in the pretty detached cottages he passed, and he thought with growing wrath of the trivial errand on which he had been sent. "In happy homes he saw the light," but none of the high purpose of the youth of "Excelsior" fame stirred his heart —rather a dull sense of failure from all high things. What did his life amount to anyway, that he should count one thing more trivial than another? He loved his wife and children dearly, but he remembered a time when his ambition had not thought of being satisfied with the daily grind for a living and a dreamless sleep at night.

"'Our life is but a sleep and a forgetting,'" he thought grimly, "in quite a different way from what Wordsworth meant." He had been one of the foremost in his class at college, an orator, an athlete, a favorite in society and with men. Great things had been predicted for him. Then he had fallen in love with Nettie; a professional career seemed to place marriage at too great a distance, and he had joyfully, yet with some struggles in his protesting intel-

lect, accepted a position that was offered to him—one of those positions which never change, in which men die still unpromoted save when a miracle intervenes. It was not so good a position for a family of six as it had been for a family of two, but he did not complain. He and Nettie went shabby, but the children were clothed in the best, as was their due.

He was too wearied at night to read anything but the newspapers, and the gentle domestic monotony was not inspiring. He and Nettie never went out in the evenings; the children could not be left alone. He met his friends on the train in that diurnal journey to and from the great city, and she occasionally attended a church tea; but their immediate and engrossing world seemed to be made up entirely of persons under thirteen years of age. They had dwelt in the place almost ever since their marriage, respected and liked, but with no real social life. If Mr. Belden thought of the years to come, he may be pardoned an unwonted sinking of the heart.

It was while indulging in these reflections that he mechanically purchased the pound of butter, which he could not help comparing with Shylock's pound of flesh, so much of life had it taken out of him, and then found himself stepping upon the platform of the station, led by his engrossing thoughts to pass the street-corner and tread the path most familiar to him. He turned with an exclamation to retrace his way, when a man pacing leisurely up and down, umbrella in hand, caught sight of him.

"Is that you, Belden?" said the stranger. "What are you doing down here to-night?"

"I came out on an errand for my wife," said Mr. Belden, sedately. He recognized the man as a young lawyer much identified with politics, a mere acquaintance; yet it was a night to make any speaking animal seem a friend, and Mr. Belden took a couple of steps along beside him.

"Waiting for a train?" he said.

"Oh, thunder, yes!" said Mr. Groper, throwing away the stump of a cigar. "I have been waiting for the last half-hour for

the train; it 's late, as usual. There 's a whole deputation from Barnet on board, due at the Reform meeting in town to-night, and I 'm part of the committee to meet them here."

"Where is the other part of the committee?" asked Mr. Belden.

"Oh, Jim Crane went up to the hall to see about something, and Connors has n't showed up at all; I suppose the rain kept him back. What kind of a meeting we 're going to have I don't know. Say, Belden, I 'm not up to this sort of thing. I wish you 'd stay and help me out; there 's no end of swells coming down, more your style than mine."

"Why, man alive, I can't do anything for you," said Mr. Belden. "These carriages, I see, are waiting for the delegation, and here comes the train now; you 'll get along all right."

He waited as the train slowed into the station, smiling anew at little Groper's perturbation. He was quite curious to see the arrivals. Barnet had been the home of his youth, and there might be some one whom

he knew. He had half intended, earlier in the day, to go himself to the Reform meeting, but a growing spirit of inaction had made him give up the idea. Yes, there was quite a car-load of people getting out—ladies, too.

"Why, Will Belden!" called out a voice from the party. A tall fellow in a long ulster sprang forward to grasp his hand. "You don't say it 's yourself come down to meet us! Here we all are, Johnson, Clemmerding, Albright, Cranston—all the old set. Rainsford, you 've heard of my cousin, Will Belden. My wife and Miss Wakeman are behind here; but we 'll do all the talking afterward if you 'll only get us off for the hall now."

"Well, I am glad to see you, Henry," said Mr. Belden, heartily. He thrust the pound of butter hastily into a large pocket of his mackintosh, and found himself shaking hands with a score of men. He had only time to assist his cousin's wife and the beautiful Miss Wakeman into a carriage, and in another moment they were all rolling

away toward the town hall, with little Mr. Groper running frantically after them, ignored by the visitors, and peacefully forgotten by his friend.

The public hall of the little town—which called itself a city—was all ablaze with light as the party entered it, and well filled notwithstanding the weather. There were flowers on the platform, where the seats for the distinguished guests were placed, and a general air of radiance and joyful import prevailed. It was a gathering of men from all political parties, concerned in the welfare of the State. Great measures were at stake, and the election of governor of immediate importance. The name of Judge Belden of Barnet was prominently mentioned. He had not been able to attend on this particular occasion, but his son had come with a delegation from the county town, twenty miles away, to represent his interests. On Mr. William Belden devolved the task of introducing the visitors; a most congenial one, he suddenly found it to be.

His friends rallied around him as people

are apt to do with one of their own kind when found in a foreign country. They called him Will, as they used to, and slapped him on the shoulder in affectionate abandon. Those among the group who had not known him before were anxious to claim acquaintance on the strength of his fame, which, it seemed, still survived him in his native town. It must not be supposed that he had not seen either his cousin or his friends during his sojourn away from them; on the contrary, he had met them once or so in two or three years, in the street or on the ferry-boat,—though they traveled by different roads,—but he had then been but a passing interest in the midst of pressing business. To-night he was the only one of their kind in a strange place—his cousin loved him, they all loved him. The expedition had the sentiment of a frolic under the severer political aspect.

In the welcome to the visitors by the home committee Mr. Belden also received his part, in their surprised recognition of him, almost amounting to a discovery.

"We had no idea that you were a nephew of Judge Belden," one of them said to him, speaking for his colleagues, who stood near.

Mr. William Belden bowed and smiled; as a gentleman, and a rather reticent one, it had never occurred to him to parade his family connections. His smile might mean anything. It made the good committeeman, who was rich and full of power, feel a little uncomfortable, as he tried to cover his embarrassment with effusive cordiality. In the background stood Mr. Groper, wet, and breathing hard, but plainly full of admiration for his tall friend, and the position he held as the center of the group. The visitors referred all arrangements to him.

At last they filed onto the platform, the two cousins together.

"You must find a place for the girls," said Henry Belden, with a peculiar boyish giggle that his cousin remembered so well. "By George, they *would* come; could n't keep 'em at home after they once got Jim Shore to say it was all right. Of course Marie Wakeman

started it; she said she was bound to go to a political meeting and sit on the platform; arguing was n't a bit of use. When she got Clara on her side I knew that I was doomed. Now you could n't get them to do a thing of this kind at home; but take a woman out of her natural sphere, and she ignores conventionalities, just like a girl in a bathing-suit. There they are, seated over in that corner. I 'm glad that they are hidden from the audience by the pillar. Of course there 's that fool of a Jim, too, with Marie."

"You don't mean to say she 's at it yet?" said his cousin William.

"'At it yet'! She 's never stopped for a moment since you kissed her that night on the hotel piazza after the hop, under old Mrs. Trelawney's window—do you remember that, Will?"

Mr. William Belden did indeed remember it; it was a salute that had echoed around their little world, leading, strangely enough, to the capitulation of another heart—it had won him his wife. But the little intimate conversation was broken off as the cousins

took the places allotted to them, and the business of the meeting began.

If he were not the chairman, he was appealed to so often as to almost serve in that capacity. He became interested in the proceedings, and in the speeches that were made; none of them, however, quite covered the ground as he understood it. His mind unconsciously formulated propositions as the flow of eloquence went on. It therefore seemed only right and fitting toward the end of the evening, when it became evident that his Honor the Mayor was not going to appear, that our distinguished fellow-citizen, Mr. William Belden, nephew of Judge Belden of Barnet, should be asked to represent the interests of the county in a speech, and that he should accept the invitation.

He stood for a moment silent before the assembly, and then all the old fire that had lain dormant for so long blazed forth in the speech that electrified the audience, was printed in all the papers afterward, and fitted into a political pamphlet.

He began with a comprehensive statement

of facts, he drew large and logical deductions from them, and then lit up the whole subject with those brilliant flashes of wit and sarcasm for which he had been famous in bygone days. More than that, a power unknown before had come to him; he felt the real knowledge and grasp of affairs which youth had denied him, and it was with an exultant thrill that his voice rang through the crowded hall and stirred the hearts of men. For the moment they felt as he felt and thought as he thought, and a storm of applause arose as he ended—applause that grew and grew until a few more pithy words were necessary from the orator before silence could be restored.

He made his way to the back of the hall for some water, and then, half exhausted, yet tingling still from the excitement, dropped into an empty chair by the side of Miss Wakeman.

"Well done, Billy," she said, giving him a little approving tap with her fan. "You were just fine." She gave him an upward glance from her large, dark eyes. "Do you

know, you have n't spoken to me to-night, nor shaken hands with me?"

"Let us shake hands now," he said, smiling, flushed with success, as he looked into the eyes of this very pretty woman.

"I shall take off my glove first—such old friends as we are! It must be a real ceremony."

She laid a soft, white, dimpled hand, covered with glistening rings, in his outstretched palm, and gazed at him with coquettish plaintiveness. "It 's so *lovely* to see you again! Have you forgotten the night you kissed me?"

"I have thought of it daily," he replied, giving her hand a hearty squeeze. They both laughed, and he took a surreptitious peep at her from under his eyelids. Marie Wakeman! Yes, truly, the same, and with the same old tricks. He had been married for nearly fourteen years, his children were half grown, he had long since given up youthful friskiness; but she was "at it" still. Why, she had been older than he when they were boy and girl; she must be

for— He gazed at her soft, rounded olive cheek, and quenched the thought.

"And you are very happy?" she pursued with tender solicitude. "Nettie makes you a perfect wife, I suppose."

"Perfect," he assented gravely.

"And you have n't missed me at all?"

"Can you ask?" It was the way in which all men spoke to Marie Wakeman, married or single, rich or poor, one with another. He laughed inwardly at his lapse into the expected tone. "I feel that I really breathe for the first time in years, now that I 'm with you again. But how is it that you are not married?"

"What, after I had known you?" She gave him a reproachful glance. "And you were so cruel to me—as soon as you had made your little Nettie jealous you cared for me no longer. Look what I 've declined, too!" She indicated Jim Shore, leaning disconsolately against the cornice, chewing his mustache. "Now don't give him your place unless you really want to; well, if you 're tired of me already—thank you ever

so much, and I *am* proud of you to-night, Billy!"

Her lustrous eyes dwelt on him lingeringly as he left her; he smiled back into them. The lines around her mouth were a little hard; she reminded him indefinably of "She"; but she was a handsome woman, and he had enjoyed the encounter. The sight of her brought back so vividly the springtime of life, his hopes, the pangs of love, the joy that was his when Nettie was won; he felt an overpowering throb of tenderness for the wife at home who had been his early dream.

The last speeches were over, but Mr. William Belden's triumph had not ended. As the acknowledged orator of the evening he had an ovation afterward; introductions and unlimited hand-shakings were in order.

He was asked to speak at a select political dinner the next week, to speak for the hospital fund, to speak for the higher education of woman. Led by a passing remark of Henry Belden's to infer that his cousin was a whist-player of parts, a prominent social

magnate at once invited him to join the party at his house on one of their whist evenings.

"My wife, er—will have great pleasure in calling on Mrs. Belden," said the magnate. "We did not know that we had a good whist-player among us. This evening has indeed been a revelation in many ways—in many ways. You would have no objection to taking a prominent part in politics if you were called upon? A reform mayor is sadly needed in our city—sadly needed. Your connection with Judge Belden would give great weight to any proposition of that kind. But of course all this is in the future."

Mr. Belden heard his name whispered, in another direction, in connection with the cashiership of the new bank which was to be built. The cashiership and the mayoralty might be nebulous honors, but it *was* sweet for once to be recognized for what he was—a man of might, a man of talent and of honor.

There was a hurried rush for the train at the last on the part of the visitors. Mr. William Belden snatched his mackintosh

from the peg whereon it had hung throughout the evening, and went with the crowd, talking and laughing in buoyant exuberance of spirits. The night had cleared; the moon was rising, and poured a flood of light upon the wet streets. It was a different world from the one he had traversed earlier in the evening. He walked home with Miss Wakeman's exaggeratedly tender "Good-by, dear Billy!" ringing in his ears, to provoke irrepressible smiles. The pulse of a free life, where men lived instead of vegetating, was in his veins. His footstep gave forth a ringing sound from the pavement; he felt himself stalwart, alert, his brain rejoicing in its sense of power. It was even with no sense of guilt that he heard the church clocks striking twelve as he reached the house where his wife had been awaiting his return for four hours.

She was sitting up for him, as he knew by the light in the parlor window. He could see her through the half-closed blinds as she sat by the table, a magazine in her lap, her attitude, unknown to herself, betraying a

listless depression. After all, is a woman glad to have all her aspirations and desires confined within four walls? She may love her cramped quarters, to be sure, but can she always forget that they are cramped? To what does a wife descend after the bright dreams of her girlhood! Does she really like above all things to be absorbed in the daily consumption of butter, and the children's clothes? or is she absorbed in these things because the man who was to have widened the horizon of her life only limits it by his own decadence?

She rose to meet her husband as she heard his key in the lock. She had exchanged her evening gown for a loose, trailing white wrapper, and her fair hair was arranged for the night in a long braid. Her husband had a smile on his face.

"You look like a girl again," he said brightly, as he stooped and kissed her. "No, don't turn out the light; come in and sit down a while longer; I 've ever so much to tell you. You can't guess where I 've been this evening."

"At the political meeting," she said promptly.

"How on earth did you know?"

"The doctor came here to see Willy, and he told me he saw you on the way. I 'm glad you did go, William; I was worrying because I had sent you out; I did not realize until later what a night it was."

"Well, I am very glad that you did send me," said her husband. He lay back in his chair, flushed and smiling at the recollection. "You ought to have been there, too; you would have liked it. What will you say if I tell you that I made a speech,—yes, it is quite true,—and was applauded to the echo? This town has just waked up to the fact that I live in it. And Henry said—but there, I 'll have to tell you the whole thing, or you can't appreciate it."

His wife leaned on the arm of his chair, watching his animated face fondly, as he recounted the adventures of the night. He pictured the scene vividly and with a strong sense of humor.

"And you don't say that Marie Wakeman

is the same as ever?" she interrupted, with a flash of special interest. "Oh, William!"

"*She* called me Billy." He laughed anew at the thought. "Upon my word, Nettie, she beats anything I ever saw or heard of."

"Did she remind you of the time you kissed her?"

"Yes!" Their eyes met in amused recognition of the past.

"Is she as handsome as ever?"

"Um—yes—I think so. She is n't as pretty as you are."

"Oh, Will!" She blushed and dimpled.

"I declare, it is true!" He gazed at her with genuine admiration. "What has come over you to-night, Nettie? You look like a girl again."

"And you were not sorry, when you saw her, that—that—"

"Sorry! I have been thinking all the way home how glad I was to have won my sweet wife. But we must n't stay shut up at home as much as we have; it 's not good for either of us. We are to be asked to join the whist club—what do you think of that? You used

to be a little card fiend once upon a time, I remember."

She sighed. "It is so long since I have been anywhere! I 'm afraid I have n't any clothes, Will. I suppose I *might*—"

"What, dear?"

"Take the money I had put aside for Mary's next quarter's music lessons; I do really believe a little rest would do her good."

"It would—it would," said Mr. Belden, with suspicious eagerness. Mary's after-dinner practising-hour had tinged much of his existence with gall. "I insist that Mary shall have a rest. And you shall join the reading society now. Let us consider ourselves a little as well as the children. It 's really best for them, too. Have n't we immortal souls as well as they? Can we expect them to seek the honeydew of paradise while they see us contented to feed on the grass of the field?"

"You call yourself an orator!" she scoffed.

He drew her to him by one end of the long braid, and solemnly kissed her. Then he

went into the hall, and took something from the pocket of his mackintosh, which he placed in his wife's hand—a little wooden dish covered with a paper, through which shone a bright yellow substance—the pound of butter, a lump of gleaming fairy gold, the quest of which had changed a poor, commonplace existence into one scintillating with magic possibilities.

Fairy gold, indeed, cannot be coined into marketable eagles. Mr. William Belden might never achieve either the mayoralty or the cashiership, but he had gained that of which money is only a trivial accessory. The recognition of men, the flashing of high thought to high thought, the claim of brotherhood in the work of the world, and the generous social intercourse that warms the earth—all these were to be his. Not even his young ambition had promised a wider field, not the gold of the Indies could buy him more of honor and respect.

At home also the spell worked. He had but to speak the word, to name the thing, and Nettie embodied his thought. He called

her young, and happy youth smiled from her clear eyes; beautiful, and a blushing loveliness enveloped her; clever, and her ready mind leaped to match with his in thought and study; dear, and love touched her with its transforming fire and breathed of long-forgotten things.

If men only knew what they could make of the women who love them! but they do not, as the plodding, faded matrons who sit and sew by their household fires testify to us daily.

Happy indeed is he who can create a paradise by naming it!

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